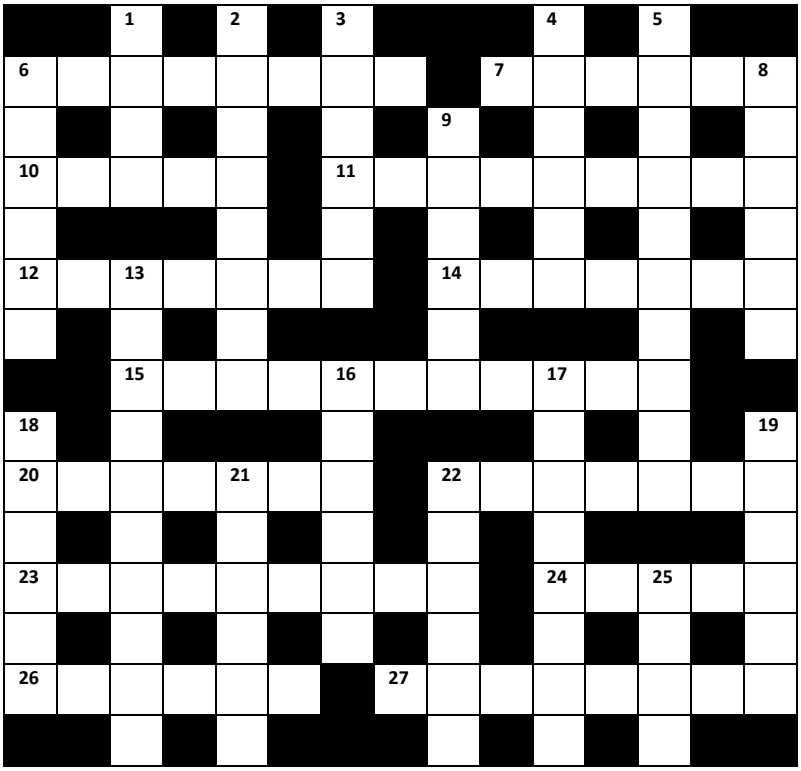
Number 697: 2 November 2026



Across

6 At this stage, Mike breaks metal instrument (8)
7 Extra on retrospective film in Barcelona given lines (2-4)
10 The listener's more good-natured, to some extent (5)
11 At first, school inspector conceals bad head's foolish behaviour (9)
12 Being repaired, saw is improved (7)
14 Walk all over Turkey, encountering trouble between two points (5,2)
15 Profligate NHS dept. after modification split (11)
20 Inform English duke in France letter from abroad should be returned (7)
22 Cool university student finishes work that's within the accepted standard (7)
23 Perhaps this might elevate the standing of Caribbean villain (5,4)
24 Cross, unpleasant person rejected both old and new (5)
26 Annoy class with vacuous lecture (6)
27 An event usually for women – consequently, man heads off (3,5)

Down

1 Tight costume annoyingly limiting (4)
2 Endlessly keen to take part in soldiers' banter (8)
3 Not being objective, bishop has questionable ideas (6)
4 Respectful coppers taking time for captain (6)
5 Lead actor nervous after premiere of show about priests (10)
6 Start to get involved in study at university (4,2)
8 Misplacing journal around small home (6)
9 Irritation beneath girl's skin is a problem (6)
13 Unsettling bird with gun – it's flapping around (10)
16 Reinforce animal enclosure beside river (6)
17 Weak MP supports one vote, barely protecting No. 10 (8)
18 Cloth dealer's minute blunder involving two types of string (6)
19 Chancellor wanting banks in Budget to hoard foreign currency (6)
21 and 22 Golfer giving men a dollar – hollow putter needs fixing (6,6)
25 Cuckoo partially circling a garden (4)

PUZZLE 696 – *Across*: **1** Decadent; **6** Rather; **9** Spur; **10** Inordinate; **11** Browse; **12** Buchanan; **13** Soft Cell; **14** Much; **16** Whit; **17** Coherent; **20** Come into; **22** Figure; **23** Woodpigeon; **24** Rove; **25** Staple; **26** Suddenly
Down: **2** Empire; **3** Arrowroot; **4** Evident; **5** Troubleshooters; **6** Radical; **7** Tonga; **8** Entrance; **14** Menagerie; **15** Throw out; **17** Concise; **18** Refined; **19** Drivel; **21** End up

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