

Meeting with Alfred Tomatis

When Jozef Vervoort thinks back to his first meeting with the ENT specialist Dr Alfred Tomatis in early 1972 in his office in Paris, two things in particular come to mind: the ascetic, radiant man in his early 50s, with his own particular aura, and the immense knowledge he drew on to be able to say such an incredible amount about a person and his or her sensibilities from two blue and red lines on a sheet of paper as a result of a hearing test. The son of the Vervoort family, who suffered a lack of oxygen at birth and had learning disabilities, was the reason for the visit to Paris. As well as the son, both father and mother had to undergo a hearing test. The child's treatment commenced on 26 December 1972, with follow-up treatment at Easter 1973 and in the summer of the same year.

At that time, Dr Tomatis had his own institute, wrote books, carried out research into speech and hearing, tinkered with new equipment and, almost "by the by", gave interested doctors, therapists and educationalists an insight into the field of Audio-Psycho-Phonology he had established. If, in Tomatis' opinion, they had adequate knowledge, he allowed them to practise as APP therapists.

Before 1976, Audio-Psycho-Phonology could only be practised under medical supervision. Then Tomatis, on leaving the chamber of doctors, was faced with the threat of exclusion. In the opinion of his peers, he had advertised his method too much, and doctors are prohibited from advertising; then as now.

In the same year, Tomatis had to look on while a comrade-in-arms and a former colleague exploited the expired patent for the Electronic Ear and developed a new device, which was offered at a lower price. The final separation came during a conference in Antwerp, which took place without Tomatis and at which a new group was formed, which, however, only existed for two years.

Some 15 faithful followers stuck by Professor Tomatis. He was also supported by a University in Toronto, Canada, which, in the following years, heavily financed the development of APP. In this way, the French pioneer in North America discovered the importance of bone conduction and precession, and developed new devices and filters for his new Electronic Ear.

In 1982, the remaining followers and representatives of new centres once again gathered in Paris, where they were given access to Tomatis' research findings and devices. New centres opened around the world and the number of his followers grew. Tomatis passed on his knowledge at conferences and seminars and on training courses until 1996.

In 1996, the then 76-year old began to withdraw from professional life. He became ill and set about finding a successor. But his "preferred candidate", the Belgian Jozef Vervoort, initially turned him down because of his professional responsibility for five primary schools in Sint-Truiden. It was not until the end of 1999 that the ill scientist received the "Yes" word from Belgium. In early 2001, he handed over all his documents to Vervoort, the result of a long and successful life in research. Alfred Angelo Tomatis did not live to see the opening of a museum in the summer of 2002 in Sint-Truiden. He died on 25 December 2001 in Carcassonne in the south of France.