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'Father of LSD' turns 100

By Tom Armitage in Zurich

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ALBERT Hofmann, the Swiss chemist who discovered the mind-bending drug LSD, celebrated his 100th birthday overnight, still sprightly some 60 years after taking his first trip.

"This is a wonderful birthday party that I am having," he told guests at a celebration. "One could say it has been a mind-expanding experience, without the LSD."

Working in a laboratory in Basel in the late 1930s, he stumbled upon the substance lysergic acid diethylamine or LSD, the drug which later fuelled a generation of musicians, poets, painters and party-goers.

Cycling along the Rhine close to the offices of his employer Sandoz, now a part of Novartis, Hofmann embarked on his first trip, discovering the hallucinogenic properties of the drug which reminded him of childhood visions.

"At home I lay down and sank into a not unpleasant intoxicated-like condition, characterised by an extremely stimulated imagination," he wrote of one of his trips.

"In a dreamlike state, with eyes closed - I found the daylight to be unpleasantly glaring; I perceived an uninterrupted stream of fantastic pictures, extraordinary shapes with intense, kaleidoscopic play of colours.

"After some two hours this condition faded away."

However, the chemist also realised it could unleash frightening and disturbing visions and warned against its use as a "pleasure drug".

"Wrong and inappropriate use has caused LSD to become my problem child," he wrote in the foreword to his book, by the same name, which aimed to restore LSD's tarnished reputation.

The US Central Intelligence Agency thought LSD, having been used in psychotherapy as a way to unlock the mind, could be the ultimate truth serum.

It soon became the favoured drug of the 1960s counter-culture, prompting psychologist Timothy Leary to coin the phrase "Turn on, tune in, drop out".

After continuing to study the hallucinogenic effects of other natural products, such as mushrooms, at Sandoz, Hofmann wrote his book *:LSD, My Problem Child*.

He lives with his wife in Burg, Switzerland.

Hofmann believes LSD could still serve a valid purpose in medicine, as it did for Aldous Huxley, author of the dystopian novel *Brave New World* who used the drug to ease his final suffering.

"LSD was used decades ago for this purpose, in dying cancer patients, for whom morphine no longer gave any relief from pain," Hofmann said.

"I am convinced that that will be a subject in the future again."

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