

THE SOUNDS OF WELLNESS

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The *Tomatis* Method extensively uses the music of Mozart and Gregorian Chant

THE SOUNDS OF WELLNESS

First time visitors often have a startled look on their faces when they enter the *Tomatis* Center in Lafayette. They probably expect to find a regular office; instead, they see children and adults wearing special headphones linked to a grey box by a long black cable. Adults lounge in big comfortable chairs or sit at tables doing art work or working on a puzzle. In the playroom, children are engaged in a card game, play checkers, draw and paint, while listening to music. "Is this for real or what?" you see them thinking. Everyone has a different reason to come to the *Tomatis* Center; some come for personal growth, others come for treatment of a wide variety of problems.

THE TOMATIS METHOD

The therapy they receive is called the *Tomatis* Method. It was developed over the last 40 years by Alfred Tomatis, a French Ear, Nose and Throat specialist. It has gained wide acceptance in Europe where more than 200 Centers use it with great results; it was introduced in America just a few years ago. Dr. Tomatis' work is increasingly gaining attention, as more and more people are getting interested in the healing power of music and sound. Recent studies are showing the importance of music in our lives, as Dr. Tomatis predicted. For example, researchers at the University of California at Irvine found that listening

for ten minutes to music of Mozart temporarily boosts the I.Q. by up to nine points. Other researchers showed that music changes the metabolism, affects muscular energy, raises or lowers blood pressure, influences digestion and has a powerful impact on our emotions and behavior.

What makes Dr. Tomatis unique is that he developed a comprehensive theory that explains why music and sounds are powerful forces that can bring healing. But Tomatis is not a pure theoretician. He is also a clinician, who has developed and built an electronic device, the *Electronic Ear*, that is used to permanently solve sometimes longstanding problems.

A LITTLE BIT OF THEORY

The basis of Tomatis's theories is that the ear plays a dominant role in human development. Hearing problems that occurred early on in our lives can have a significant impact on how well we develop. Tomatis further emphasizes that **ears are not just for hearing, but also to control our balance and coordination.** This is the role of the vestibule, located in the inner ear. Motor skills and coordination problems often stem from the vestibule not functioning well. Tomatis also notes that **ears are designed to energize the brain.** For this to happen, the ear must perceive high-frequency sounds well; these sounds stimulate the brain whereas low-frequency sounds drain energy away. The *Tomatis* training stimulates the ear, so that it can function optimally, thereby improving learning abilities, memory, attention, and creating an overall sense of wellness.

The *Tomatis* Method has been used for many different purposes, too many to discuss in this brochure. This document focuses on how the *Tomatis* Method enhances creativity and deepens the process of self-transformation. It also shows how *Tomatis* gives extra energy and helps in overcoming depression. Lastly, it describes how *Tomatis* helps singers and musicians to fine-tune their voice and skills. The *Tomatis* Method also treats a wide variety of problems, many seemingly unrelated to the ear, such as learning disabilities, autism, motor skills problems, auditory processing problems, anxiety disorders, chronic fatigue syndrome, post-traumatic stress disorder, and head trauma. It also speeds up learning foreign languages and improves communication skills, especially useful for business people.

SINGING ALL DAY LONG

"I was certainly not prepared for what happened to me," says Pierre Sollier, Director of the Lafayette *Tomatis* Center and a licensed Marriage, Family and Child Counselor. "When I came to the USA, I couldn't speak English clearly enough to be understood. A friend of mine suggested that I go to the *Tomatis* Center in Paris to improve my accent.

I still remember him telling me that Dr. Tomatis could "tune up my ears" to the frequencies of the American language. The theory was simple: You can only reproduce a sound if you can hear it. I was "deaf" for the frequencies used in the American Language, and therefore I could not pronounce them either. Treatment under Tomatis' *Electronic Ear* was supposed to do the trick. I was very skeptical. It sounded like science-fiction to me. Nevertheless, I started to read Tomatis' books. To my surprise, they gave me a better understanding of my students' problems than any book or training had ever been able to do. I could see that Tomatis was right. That led me to the Paris Center."

"I had no other goal than to improve my English. It did improve, but unexpected things happened too. My energy level increased tremendously. I was teaching difficult classes but didn't feel tired anymore by the end of the day. I was singing from early morning till late in the evening, totally out of character for me. The sense of an underlying depression that I had felt throughout most of my life was replaced by an incredible sense of joy and freedom. Things were easier to do: they didn't look like impossible challenges. Thoughts and ideas seemed to organize themselves in new and creative ways. I felt better in control of my life, with a better awareness of myself and of my relationships."

"What amazed me most was my new appreciation of music. I thought that I heard music like everyone else. But after 10 days of the *Tomatis* Method, I heard it differently. It was like going from mono to stereo. There was suddenly a depth, a richness that I had never suspected. It was as if I had been deaf while hearing at the same time."

DO YOU LISTEN?

Tomatis explains that "deafness" by emphasizing the difference between **hearing** and **listening**. Hearing he says is a passive act, while listening is an active process, requiring the strong desire to focus, to pay attention. The best proof is that many people with a good hearing are not necessarily good listeners. It is only when we have that desire to pay attention that

listening becomes alive. Listening is a psychological process involving the whole person. For Tomatis, the desire to listen is the "royal road" for language development and communication, and provides the basis for human growth. But he points out that what happens in our lives, like diseases, traumas can affect listening and stunt individual growth. The goal of the *Tomatis* Method is to restore the desire to listen, so that the client can develop his or her abilities to their full potential.

83 AND GOING STRONG

"I have a deep trust in the Method," says Pierre Sollier. "Although I know what to expect, I continue to be amazed by the changes I see. These are particularly striking when working with children who have major motor-skills problems. It usually doesn't take too long before you see changes in posture, balance and coordination. But it works for adults too. We recently saw "Nancy," an 83 year-old woman who had trouble keeping her balance. That was particularly threatening for her since she was also losing her eyesight. After a few days of *Tomatis* training, she told us that her stride was getting better and that she felt more confident walking. Her mind started to be sharper again and she was full of joy. Her friends were quite amazed."

"What makes this case interesting is that Nancy had a severe hearing loss in both ears. From the start, we made it clear that we were not going to improve her hearing, but that we could help her to regain a better balance and to feel more energized. It is important to be clear about this, because someone may confuse *listening* skills with *hearing* skills. **Tomatis does not help deafness.** That is the domain of audiologists; actually we refer hearing impaired clients to them. Our role is very different."

There was no miracle in Nancy's case. As we have seen, the vestibule, which is part of the inner ear,

Dr. Alfred A. Tomatis



controls balance, coordination, muscle tone and body image awareness. With the *Tomatis* Method it is possible to regulate the vestibule and so improve balance and posture, bringing about a better sense of self and better functioning.

"What it is important to remember," says Tomatis, "is that the brain doesn't produce the energy. It captures it." He estimates that about 80% of the energy that the brain needs is processed through the inner ear. The vestibule processes all the sensory information coming from our body movements. That is why when we

come back from the gym, we feel energized. Another important part of the stimulation of our brain is processed through the cochlea, also part of the inner ear. The cochlea processes all the information from our environment and from our voice. Tomatis points out that singers feel energized after singing, a fact that he observed first hand since his father was a famous opera singer. If we perceive the high frequencies well, singing can be very energizing. This requires, asserts Tomatis, that the muscles of the middle ear work properly. By listening to sounds that the *Electronic Ear* switches gently, from low-pitched to high-pitched sounds, we can condition those muscles to better respond to a broader frequency spectrum. And as a new world of sounds opens, so does the awareness of ourselves and of the world around us.

NO LONGER DEPRESSED

This is particularly true in the case of depression. When "Camille" came to the Lafayette *Tomatis* Center, she had been severely depressed for several months and was seriously considering suicide. She could not sleep, forgot to eat and had been unable to work for a long time. She had a poor sense of boundaries and had often been abused by men. Because of the severity of her problems, she received, in addition to the *Tomatis* program, counseling sessions to help her stabilize. After three days,

Camille reported that she was sleeping a lot, cooking and eating well, and that she felt less desperate. During the first part of her program, Camille reported a gradual increase of her energy level, and a sense of well-being that she had not felt for a long time. All the symptoms of the severe depression disappeared. Right after the first segment of the program, she found a job. In the following months, as she was completing the program, she took a hard look at her relationships and started to develop a healthier sense of boundaries. She didn't feel depleted any longer by old and unresolved conflicts. She was moving forward with growing awareness of her strengths. Today, the depression seems only a bad memory.

"What was fascinating to watch," says Pierre Sollier, "was how she took charge of herself very rapidly. She became her own therapist, her own healer. Sound stimulation brought new insights to her constantly. However, it is one thing to have insights, it is a different matter to act upon them, to bring about changes. But Camille could barely wait to act upon them. She did so without hesitation or anxiety but with a sense of joy and independence. In her relationships with men, the changes were striking. As a therapist, I feel much more fulfilled by this way of working."

A BOOST OF CREATIVITY

The new awareness of oneself often translates into an increase in creativity. For this reason, writers, painters, composers, and musicians, have long been attracted to the *Tomatis* Method. It expands and deepens the awareness of their skills while boosting their output. At the Lafayette Center, we saw a writer who had been crippled by a writing block for several months.

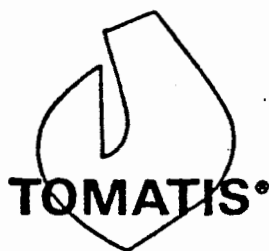
He started to write again after a few days of *Tomatis* training. "I have so many ideas! Mozart makes me intelligent!", he claimed as he was scribbling furiously, finally finding the missing link for his plot. We also saw a dancer who, while technically at his peak, didn't feel anymore "the dance from the inside out." As the training progressed, he was able to put meaning into his dance and to understand that he didn't want to give it up, as he had thought. But it is not necessary to be an artist to improve creativity. A businessman may report that he finds new ways to resolve problems. Many people say that they are now looking forward to do new things and to their surprise enjoy doing them.

VOICE TRAINING

"I think that they are finding their voice, their true self," says Pierre Sollier, who notes that the voice of some clients literally changes. It is because the ear controls the timber, the intensity, the rhythm and the flow of the voice. If the ear is out of tune, the voice is out of tune. We speak, we read, we sing with our ears, repeats Tomatis frequently. This is not a simple joke. By expanding the range of perception of sounds, the range of the voice is expanded. For several decades now, singers like Maria Callas, the famous opera singer, have experienced the *Tomatis* Method. The French actor Gerard Depardieu credits Tomatis ("Dr. Mozart") as one of the three people to whom he attributes his phenomenal success.

There is more to say about the *Tomatis* Method than this short introduction. If you would like more information, please feel free to come to our monthly free lecture at the Center or call to arrange a free personal consultation or a visit to the *Tomatis* Center.

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