

Molecules have no morals: ecstasy godfather Alexander Shulgin's legacy

Posted on Tuesday 10th June 2014

[Dr Simon Cotton \(/staff/profiles/chemistry/cotton-simon.aspx\)](#) writes for The Conversation:

The first time ecstasy impinged on the public consciousness in Britain was in November 1995, when an 18-year old Essex schoolgirl named Leah Betts died a few days after taking a tablet at a birthday party. The cause of her death was drinking seven litres of water in 90 minutes, resulting in brain damage – drinking plenty of water was recommended to combat dehydration at rave parties – but ecstasy was widely blamed.

On June 2, the godfather of ecstasy, Alexander Shulgin died. Often called “Sasha”, his name is inextricably linked to the drug. The chemical technically abbreviated as MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxy-N-methylamphetamine) exploded onto the popular musical scene during the 1980s, first in the US, then moving to Europe, originally associated with dance clubs in Ibiza.

But Shulgin deserves to be remembered for more than this one chemical. He trained as a chemist and obtained a PhD in biochemistry at the University of California, Berkeley. He had a successful research career, working for Dow Chemicals as a synthetic chemist, when he created Zectran, the first biodegradable pesticide, and a very profitable one. In his spare time, Shulgin began to investigate psychoactive molecules, a pursuit influenced by his sampling mescaline.

Read the full article on **[The Conversation \(http://theconversation.com/molecules-have-no-morals-ecstasy-godfather-alexander-shulgins-legacy-27611\)](http://theconversation.com/molecules-have-no-morals-ecstasy-godfather-alexander-shulgins-legacy-27611)**