

Authority on sensory sciences

1961 Nobel Prize winner appointed to U.H. faculty

By HELLEN ALTONN

A 66-year old Hungarian scientist who enriched the field of acoustics and won the 1961 Nobel Peace Prize for his contributions to medicine will join the University of Hawaii next spring.

Dr. Georg von Bekesy appointed professor of sensory sciences, will bring to the Manoa Campus a major research operation in psychophysical and communication studies.

He is the university's first Nobel Prize recipient and will fill an academic chair financed by the Hawaiian Telephone Company.

Dr. von Bekesy, fascinated in his youth by high-pitched Gypsy music, was working as a research physicist in the Hungarian telephone system laboratory when a question occurred to him: How much better is the ear than the telephone system?

He devoted more than 34 years to finding an answer to the question, his research leading to his Nobel Prize.

The results of his work were compiled in a book, "Experiments in Hearing."

Thomas H. Hamilton, university president, hailed the appointment of Dr. von Bekesy as a scientist of "stature and eminence."

He said Dr. von Bekesy "will play an important role in assisting with the scientific development of Hawaii."

One of the world's leading scientists in the field of anatomy and physiology of the ear, Dr. von Bekesy has worked since 1947 in the Psycho-Acoustic Laboratory at Harvard University.

He was in Hawaii last month, as a consultant to the Pacific Biomedical Research Center, and was here before in December, 1964, to lecture and conduct seminars at the university.

Dr. von Bekesy is described by the Acoustical Society of America as a man of many scientific disciplines, as a "physicist, anatomist, physiologist and experimenter extraordinary."

He works in his laboratory from early morning until late at night.

He once said, "I like a lonely life . . . Concentration on one field is possible only if you are lonely to a certain degree.

"If someone is a scientist, he loves to work on some problem and my hope is to contribute to the deafness problem."

He likes archaeology, however, and collects primitive objects as his hobby, hanging them around his laboratory with

magnified models of ears and gleaming equipment.

He recently has been working with the development of a mechanical model of the inner ear with a nerve supply represented by the skin of the arm.

Von Bekesy's early education was received in Munich, Constantinople, Budapest and Zurich.

He went to Harvard as a research lecturer in 1948 and has remained there.

He will be the third University of Hawaii professor to hold membership in the national Academy of Sciences, one of many honors.

The professorship which he will occupy was created by the Hawaiian Telephone Company last month to emphasize higher education in Hawaii and assist the university in bringing a noted educator to the faculty.