

UH's Nobel Prize Winner Hopes to Get a Line on Fish . . . And Hook Some Clues to Humans

By JAMES CUNNINGHAM

Dr. Georg von Bekesy, the first Nobel Prize winner on the University of Hawaii faculty, came here hoping to find out from fish how we see, hear, feel, smell and taste.

The 67-year-old, Hungarian-born physicist arrived from Harvard University Tuesday to prepare to head research at the new UH Laboratory of Sensory Sciences.

The added research arm on the Manoa campus is expected to become operational about Jan. 1st. It will occupy 12,000 square feet of special vibration-free quarters being renovated at a cost of \$250,000.

Von Bekesy is bringing with him a library of 5,000 books, 21 trunks full of instruments, and a technician to assemble equipment required for the laboratory.

Why is the man who won the 1961 Nobel Prize in Medicine and Physiology coming to Hawaii to continue his investigations of the senses and how they work?

"Well, for one thing, I like it here and like the people," he said. "I delivered lectures here two years ago and decided I wanted to come back.

"Also, I have done most of my research on humans, guinea pigs and higher vertebrates.

Now I would like to go down to fish. I think many of the phenomena I am interested in investigating may be observed in fish.

"If that is so, it will make the studies much simpler. And certainly it will make them much cheaper."

Von Bekesy said he declined offers to go to Florida because of the humidity, and to Los Angeles because of the smog.

"Of course I could think of a reason like that for not going to each place other than Hawaii," he added.

"They are there swimming around right now," he said. "And like everyone else I am interested in the dolphins. They are saying things to us. It really hurts me that I cannot understand what they are saying."

Von Bekesy does not know which fish eventually will become targets for his observation.

"You have to pick the best animals for a specific experiment. I will have to go along with many different fish before I find out which is the best."

As in all his work, Von Bekesy's objectives here will be conducted in the interests of pure science. Like those which won him his highest honors,

however, they may result in important practical applications.

His solution of the mechanics of the inner ear, for instance, is now being used to diagnose hearing ailments.

After years of concentration on hearing, sight and skin sensations, he turned most recently to smell and taste as well.

"There may even be more than five senses," he says. "There are some phenomena that I cannot explain in those terms."

Asked what fruits of research here would make him happiest, he replied:

"If I could find out how physical stimulus is transformed into electrical discharges in the nervous system and transmitted to the brain, I would feel I had done something really worthwhile.

"But I doubt that I will ever solve that mystery. I would be willing to settle for finding out which membrane in the most important to the transformation of physical stimuli, like taste or pressure, into nerve action.

"If I could locate that transducer, it would offer the most next generation of researchers a clear view for the next step in the direction I want to go."