

THREE STAR GAZERS WIN PHYSICS NOBEL

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Dr. Mayor, who is an astrophysicist, and Dr. Queloz, an astronomer who is also at the University of Cambridge in Britain, will share the other half.

A clearly delighted Peebles giggled repeatedly during a phone interview with The Associated Press, recalling how he answered a 5.30 a.m. phone call from Stockholm thinking that {lsquo}{lsquo}it's either something very wonderful or it's something horrible.{rsquo}{rsquo}

Peebles said he told his wife about the award, {lsquo}{lsquo}And of course her reaction was, 'Oh my God!'{rsquo}{rsquo}

Dr. Mayor and Dr. Queloz were credited with having “started a revolution in astronomy” notably with the discovery of exoplanet 51 Pegasi B, a gaseous ball comparable with Jupiter, in 1995 — a time when, as Dr. Mayor recalled — “no one knew whether exoplanets existed or not.” “Prestigious astronomers had been searching for them for years, in vain!” Dr. Mayor quipped.

The committee said more than 4,000 exoplanets have since been found in the Milky Way.

“Mayor and Queloz pioneered the path that will allow our generation to address one of the most exciting questions in science: Are we alone?” wrote Avi Loeb, chair of the Harvard University astronomy department, in an email.

“We now know that about a quarter of all stars have a planet of Earth’s size and surface temperature, with the potential of hosting liquid water and chemistry of life on its surface,” he said.

Dr. Queloz was meeting with other academics interested in finding new planets when the press office at Cambridge University interrupted to tell him the big news: He had won the Nobel. He thought it was joke at first. “I could barely breathe,” Dr. Queloz said.

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