

GEORGE BAKER

Biography

A native of Dallas, a young George Baker won the American Guild of Organists National Competition in Organ Playing in 1970 and created a sensation in the organ world with his subsequent featured recital for that organization's national convention two years later. He then went to Paris to study organ and improvisation as well as to record. He returned to America to teach organ, then entered medical school. Almost four decades later he has come full circle, returning to music as a performer, improviser, composer and teacher.

George Baker has received training with some of the finest organ teachers of the twentieth-century. He obtained his Bachelor's degree from Southern Methodist University under Robert Anderson, after which he traveled to Paris to study with Marie-Claire Alain, Pierre Cochereau, Jean Langlais and André Marchal. During his time in France, Baker earned the Prix de Virtuosit  with Mention Maximum from the Schola Cantorum, under Langlais. Ultimately, he returned to the United States where he earned a Master of Music degree on full scholarship from the University of Miami, a Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Michigan, and began teaching at Catholic University in Washington D.C. before deciding to undertake the challenge of becoming a medical doctor. Although he obtained his M.D. and became a dermatologist, Dr. Baker never ceased performing, composing, teaching and recording.

In his early years as a musician, George Baker won first prizes by unanimous jury decisions in several major organ competitions including the American Guild of Organists (Buffalo, 1970), the Grand Prix de Chartres (Chartres, France, 1974) and the International

Improvisation Competition (Lyon, France, 1979). His recording credits include the complete organ works of J. S. Bach (1979) and the complete organ works of Louis Vierne (world premiere recording, released in 1994, a project he shared with Pierre Cochereau). He has been awarded three French Grand Prix du Disque, two of which were for *The Complete Organ Works of Darius Milhaud*. In 1995, the eight CD Vierne set won the coveted Grand Prix Spécial du Jury from the Nouvelle Académie du Disque Français. In 2000, the same recording won a critic's choice award from American Record Guide.

George Baker's compositions, published by H. T. Fitzsimmons, Fred Bock Music and Gentry Publications, have been performed both in the United States and in Europe. Dr. Baker has served on juries in several prestigious organ competitions including the Grand Prix de Chartres in 2000 and 2004. Special areas of interest include the music of Louis Vierne and Maurice Duruflé, improvisation in the French style, and the organ building of Cavaillé-Coll. His is also in frequent demand as a consultant for organ building and restoration projects. He serves as the USA representative for Orgues Bertrand Cattiaux, French organbuilder, voicer and restorer of such instruments as Notre-Dame de Paris and St-Sernin de Toulouse.

Currently, at Southern Methodist University, Dr. Baker serves as Associate University Organist. In 2003, Naxos released Volume 13 of *The Organ Works of Marcel Dupré*, recorded on the restored and enlarged Perkins Chapel organ at SMU. In 2007, he recorded a CD of the works of his teacher Jean Langlais on the famous 1888 Cavaillé-Coll organ of St-Sernin de Toulouse. The following year, he recorded three of his own works at St-Sulpice in Paris as part of a CD honoring his former mentor Pierre Cochereau. These two CDs were released on the Solstice label (France). On March 7, 2009, Baker was one of three Cochereau students chosen to

play a special concert at Notre-Dame de Paris, honoring the twenty-fifth anniversary of Cochereau's death. Works in progress include a video workshop with accompanying text on the subject of organ improvisation, which will be released in the Spring of 2010.

George Baker first appeared on the roster of Karen McFarlane Artists as a young artist, to which he has returned at the beginning of the new millennium. He was a featured artist at the 2004 AGO National Convention in Los Angeles.

Current as of August 2009

GEORGE BAKER

Press Notices

Jean Langlais: Un centenaire; Oeuvres pour orgue, George C. Baker, St-Sernin de Toulouse, Solstice SOCD 240, recorded August 2007

“The virtuoso Texan, with all of his brilliance, never abandons a happy and nonchalant ease of performance (one would say in English: debonair), even in the technically difficult, jerky or tense passages, which are executed with a facile precision. The natural quality of his playing brings out the finest in these pieces, which are among the best composed as well as the most accessible works of Langlais.”

5 of 5 Diapason rating

Paul de Luit, *Le Diapason* (Paris, France) January 2008

“Baker distills with love the music of Langlais, of medieval flavors in Gregorian modes, balancing poetry, fervor, virtuosity of writing, and contrasting architectural structures, beautifully putting them in place. In short, Baker gives a powerful performance of light and shadows, full of nuances and contrasts, reminding us what an eloquent poet of the organ was Jean Langlais.”

Michel Roubinet, *Le Monde de la Musique*, November 2007

“[Baker] plays brilliantly where called for, caressingly, elsewhere. Bottom line: Attractive organ works, elegantly played.”

***The Dallas Morning News*, 2007**

OTHER REVIEWS

“With rock-solid assurance, Dr. Baker captured all the music’s drama, but also its tenderness and even playfulness [Messiaen *La nativité du Seigneur*]. And he tossed off the final toccata of “God Among Us” with, as Messiaen would have wished, almost giddy virtuosity.”

***The Dallas Morning News*, 2008**

“... George C. Baker utilizes with exquisite poetry the possibilities of the Cavaillé-Coll organ at Saint-Ouen de Rouen. As light plays on a stained glass window, he continuously invents new sonorous colors.”

***Répertoire des disques compacts* (France)**

“... A superb homage to the man and to the composer ... Baker offers us the fourth complete CD version of *Les Pièces in Style Libre* — by far the best. ... One admires the talents of Baker the colorist, handling the great organ as if it were a more modest instrument, and using its rich resources to bring a great variety of tonal colors to the music. (Five Diapasons awarded)

***Diapason* (France)**

“Remarkable ... Baker liberates all of the romantic verve the music [*24 Pièces de Fantaisie*] has to offer. ... His interpretation perfectly and instinctively expresses and defines Vierne’s profound personality.”

***Répertoire* (France)**

“... The *Marche Triomphale*, with brass and percussion, capitalizes on the Saint-Ouen acoustic as Baker articulates crisply and with heavy emphasis. Other impressive tracks include the reconstructed improvisation that Vierne recorded for Odéon in 1929, later transcribed by Maurice Duruflé, and the four suites of character pieces [*24 Pièces de Fantaisie*] whose technical and musical challenges rival those of the six symphonies ... Baker’s return to music making for a spell is a glad reminder of Shelly’s words, ‘For love and beauty and delight, there is no death or change.’”

The American Organist

“... This lovely piece [*Berceuse-Paraphrase*] ... is a six-minute work that reveals the composer’s Francophilia and sounds like something Duruflé might have improvised on Christmas Eve. Highly recommended.”

The Diapason

(Vierne Complete Organ Works) “... our firm front-runner for interpretation ...”

Organists’ Review

(Vierne Complete Organ Works) “Baker, of course, is well known in organ circles for his outstanding performances and his dedication to the French repertoire. ... his accurate playing coupled with the resonant sound makes this the complete collection of choice.”

American Record Guide

“The evening’s highlight was Dr. Baker’s own extemporization on the gospel hymn “*I come to the garden,*” rich in juicy chords and modulations worthy of Cochereau himself.”

The Dallas Morning News

(Dupré Works for Organ, Vol. 13, Naxos) “... Dr. Baker plays with virtuosity and grace, and, from purr to thunder, the organ in SMU’s resonant Perkins Chapel does a good imitation of its French cathedral models.”

Scott Cantrell, The Dallas Morning News

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Discography

Cochereau, (four organists render homage), 2008	Solstice
Langlais: An Anthology for a Centenary, 2007	Solstice
Organ Works of Marcel Dupré, Vol. 13, 2003	Naxos
Complete Organ Works of J. S. Bach, 1979	Disques FY, France
Complete Organ Works of Louis Vierne, 1994	Solstice
Complete Organ Works of Darius Milhaud, 1974	Disques FY
Organ Works of Reger and Hindemith, 1975	Disques FY
Organ Works of DuMage and Clérambault, 1976	Disques FY
Organ Works of American Composers, 1976	Disques FY
Organ Works of Widor and Vierne, 1990	Solstice
Riches to Rags: Works of Bach and Joplin, 1997	Baroque Notes, Inc.

GEORGE BAKER
Compositions

ORGAN

<u>Berceuse-Paraphrase</u> , 1992	HT Fitzsimmons Co
<u>Divertissement</u> , in collection <i>Hommage a Langlais</i> , 1996	HT Fitzsimmons Co
<u>At the River</u> , in collection <i>Encore! Encore!</i> , 2000	Fred Bock Music Co
<u>Tuba Tune Ragtime</u> , 2003	Gentry Publications
<u>Ricercare on Nun komm der Heiden Heiland</u> , 2004	Pub. pending
<u>Toccat-Gigue on the Sussex Carol</u> , 2008	Pub. pending

CHORAL

<u>Noëls</u> , 2000	Gentry Publications
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ARTICLES

“An Interview with Maurice Duruflé.” *The American Organist*, November 1980.