

Perkins Chapel Organ Demonstration:

Tuesday Nov. 8, 2016 7pm – 8:30pm

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, improvisation and composition as well as to record. He returned to America to teach organ, then entered medical school. Almost three 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 Virtuosité 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 Complete Organ Works of J. S. Bach (1979, the first by an American) and 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 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, Gentry Publications, and Baroque Notes, Inc. 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 in 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. He is also in demand as a [consultant](#) for organ building and restoration projects.

Currently, Dr. Baker teaches organ improvisation at Rice University in Houston, Texas. Among other musical projects, he is working on an organ improvisation workbook, which will be published in late 2013.

George Baker first appeared on the roster of [Karen McFarlane Artists, Inc.](#) 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.

Baker staying sharp on organ keys

Program highlights composition skills

04/03/2001

By Scott Cantrell / The Dallas Morning News

George Baker may have been the most brilliant among dozens of superb organists who, between the 1960s and '90s, came out of the Southern Methodist University studio of Robert T. Anderson. By age 30 he'd won practically every organ competition, had a doctorate, a university teaching position, an active concert career and a discography including the complete organ works of Bach.

Then Dr. Baker put the organ on hold, got himself M.D. and M.B.A. degrees and started practicing dermatology. Happily, in more recent years he has been spending more time back at the organ. He now teaches part time at SMU and directs the music at Perkins Chapel, and he's again hung out his shingle as a concert organist.

Dr. Baker was the driving force behind the recent rebuilding and considerable enlargement of the Perkins Chapel organ. And he gave the organ's French accent a good workout Monday evening with a mostly French program.

One longed for at least one meaty work to vary the diet of short pieces – quite a few of them soft and slow – but the Louis Vierne *Impromptu* proved that Dr. Baker's digits and tootsies are still nimble. His skills as a composer were demonstrated in two attractive introspections, *At the River* (based on the eponymous hymn) and *Berceuse-Paraphrase* (based on both American and English tunes of "O little town of Bethlehem").

He also offered two of his own transcriptions of improvisations recorded by his teacher, Pierre Cochereau. Cochereau's *In Memoriam Louis Vierne* effectively expanded upon Vierne's *Berceuse*, which Dr. Baker also played. 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 Vierne *Andantino* was played with a lovely ebb and flow, and there was a fine flair for Jean Langlais' *Te Deum*. Elsewhere, the music tended to tick along too metronomically, with too little sense of harmonic tensions and releases. On the organ, rhythm is the most important expressive device.

Concluding the program, Dr. Baker's arrangements of three Scott Joplin rags may have raised an eyebrow or two. But ragtime was all the rage in Paris in the 1920s, and Dr. Baker proved that the Perkins Chapel organ can get down and at least a little dirty. More than one person in the audience was heard to laugh out loud, which was, as the French would say, "comme il faut" – as it should be.

Online at: http://www.dallasnews.com/entertainment/328475_baker_03ove.AR.html

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