

DUCK BAKER

Duck Baker is one of the most highly regarded fingerstyle guitarists of his generation. He is unique among jazz guitarists in that his repertoire spans the entire history of the music from ragtime through swing to modern masters like Thelonious Monk and Herbie Nichols to free improvisation. Baker's devotion to American music also encompasses more traditional forms like blues, gospel, and Appalachian music and its Scots-Irish ancestry. This catholicism has been likened to Europeans who perform the classical repertoire from renaissance through to modern music.

Duck was born Richard R. Baker IV in 1949 and grew up in Richmond, Virginia. He passed his teenage years playing in rock and blues bands before becoming interested in acoustic blues. Local ragtime pianist Buck Evans was a major influence on Baker's evolution. By the time he moved to San Francisco in the early seventies, he was performing the wide range of material heard on his first record for the Kicking Mule label, "There's Something for Everyone in America". In addition to developing his solo style, Baker joined a bluegrass band and immersed himself in the local swing jazz scene, forming a duo with guitarist Thom Keats and performing with such Bay Area luminaries as Burt Bales and Robin Hodes. Baker remains active in this music, leading a trio with guitarist Bob Wilson and fiddler Tony Marcus.

In the late seventies, Baker recorded four more records for Kicking Mule, including two devoted to jazz and the first solo guitar record of Irish and Scottish music. He also began touring as a soloist, traveling throughout North America, Western Europe, and Australia. He eventually moved to Europe where he was based for nine years before returning to San Francisco in 1987. It was also in the late seventies that Baker became associated with the free music scene, performing with musicians like Eugene Chadbourne and John Zorn in New York and Bruce Ackley and Henry Kaiser in San Francisco. His associations in the 90's included the highly regarded Irish fiddler, Kieran Fahy, and the great traditional singer, Molly Andrews. As of 2002 he is involved in several other duos: with trombone master Roswell Rudd, bassist Mark Dresser, and guitarists Jamie Findlay, Woody Mann and Ken Emerson. He also leads a trio which includes violinist Carla Kihlstedt and clarinetist Ben Goldberg.

Baker's solo recordings since 1980 have for the most part focused on his own compositions, which reflect the influence of the great jazz pianist/composers like Monk, Nichols, Randy Weston, etc. His pieces have been recorded by various other guitarists, as well as Irish and American traditionalists and modern jazzmen. His most ambitious record, "Spinning Song", which is devoted to the music of Herbie Nichols, got rave reviews in Jazz Times, Cadence, Coda, and the New York Times, and helped establish Baker as an important voice in the world of fingerstyle jazz guitar. Various critics named "Spinning Song" among the best jazz records of 1997 in Cadence and Coda magazines, and it placed high on the Cadence reader's poll of that year. Acoustic Guitar magazine dubbed it "one of the best guitar records ever recorded - by anybody."