

# News

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**\*\*World-class organist opts for medical career**

Editor's Note: George Baker will perform in concert Aug. 19 at 7:30 p.m. in SMU's Caruth Auditorium in honor of Southwestern Medical School's 40th anniversary. The public recital is free.

DALLAS--From the majestic cathedrals of Paris to the glamorized recording studios of LA, George Baker has fulfilled his musical dreams.

Since his first public organ recital when he was 12, 32-year-old Baker has won numerous organ playing competitions including the highly coveted Grand Prix de Chartres in France, considered by many to be the most prestigious organ competition in the world. He has played over 150 concerts in America and Europe, including performances at Notre-Dame de Paris. And he has recorded 26 LP's.

Having attained such musical stature as a young man, Baker is eager to reach new heights.

"I've done everything I wanted or dreamed of in music, I guess I did it too young," explains the Dallas native. "There's a lot left of my life and many interesting things I've dreamed of doing."

This month he will realize a childhood dream of being a doctor as he joins 207 incoming first year medical students at Southwestern. The freshman class will be special guests at a public organ recital Baker will perform Aug. 19 in Caruth Auditorium at Southern Methodist University.

"I've spent a lot of time figuring out why I wanted to go to medical school," says Baker. "Some of the attraction is the complexity of it. The more I learn about the human body, the more fascinated I become. The organ is the same thing--a monstrously complex machine that you drive. And medicine provides fascinating visual scenery when you walk into the ICU or OR; I was attracted to the organ visually because of its complexity."

The drama of medicine has always appealed to him, even at the peak of his musical training.

"Ever since I was a child, 10 or 11 years old, I wanted to be a doctor," Baker recalls. "I didn't aim for it in high school or college because the momentum was towards music and I didn't have time."

He began his musical training with piano study at the age of four, and organ study at age 11, yet he says he didn't start realizing his potential until his junior year in high school.

"I didn't start working until I was 16 and from that point on I was obsessive/compulsive, a workaholic. I have a lot of self-discipline and willpower and can make myself accomplish things."

At age 18, Baker won the Southwest Regional Organ Playing Competition of the American Guild of Organists. The following year, he became the youngest person to win the National

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Organ Playing Competition of the AGO.

From college on, he practiced the organ six hours a day.

Upon graduation from SMU, he studied for two years in Paris. He later earned a master's in theory/composition from the University of Miami and a doctor of musical arts degree from the University of Michigan.

In 1974 he was the unanimous winner of the Grand Prix de Chartres. The prize carried with it 10,000 francs and a record contract. He made the world premiere recording of the complete organ works of Darius Milhaud, which won for him two Grand Prix du Disque. He subsequently recorded for Disques FY (RCA France) works by Hindemith, Clerambault/DuMAGE, Reger, Ives and the first recording by an American of the complete organ works by J.S. Bach, a 19-record set. Twenty-four of the 26 LP's he has made were recorded in cathedrals in France, two were recorded in the states.

In 1975, under the coaching of Jean Langlais, Baker became one of two Americans ever to earn the Diplome de Virtuosite' in organ and improvisation with highest honors. In 1979, he won first prize in the International Improvisation Competition in Lyon, France, becoming the first American organist to achieve this distinction.

Despite the fame, Baker was ready for "another pole to climb."

As early as 1977, he met with Dr. Bryan Williams, associate dean for Student Affairs, and questioned him about medical school. "We talked over the idea of med school and at that time it was hard to get in. Between '75 and '77 was the worst time to apply because the number of applicants was greater than the available places. And they didn't take many older students then."

Thinking his chances of being accepted to medical school were slim, he turned to his music with renewed vigor.

"For two years after 1977 I was gung ho and then I had the same despondency. Medicine was always gnawing at me," Baker says. Trying to motivate students as head of the Organ Department at the Catholic University of American in Washington, D.C. increased his feelings of frustration and disappointment.

Finally as a musical diversion, he got a song writing contract and moved to LA for six months. "I was writing rock 'n roll songs and playing studio gigs. Had I stayed there long enough, I would've had a hit, at least a little hit, say in the top 200."

Yet, a short while later, walking along the beaches of Waikiki with his brother, who was then a junior in medical school himself, Baker felt determined to pursue medicine. "I said if I was not too old, I would get into medical school and from Honolulu I called Southwestern for statistics on admissions. Five percent of the students admitted were older than 30. At that point I said 'let's go,' and I went to LA and packed."

He enrolled at SMU in 1981 to fulfill his premed requirements and last January was notified of his acceptance to SMS. He admits to feeling a little nervous about the rigors of the medical curriculum.

"I tend to worry," he says. "I am uptight about studies. I could spend time wondering and worrying if I'm going to do OK in med school but that's a waste of time. I will do the best I can. I am really curious and like to learn interesting things and the human body has a plethora of them."

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Photos available upon request

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