

780 words/ 5.3 minutes

“Celebrating the Life of David Baker”

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

President, Indiana University

Musical Arts Center

Saturday, January 21, 2017

7:00 PM

1. INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Dean Richards, and good evening.

Tonight, we gather to celebrate David Baker’s life and legacy as a pioneering jazz educator, a scholar of enormous range, an innovative and virtuosic performer, a prolific composer of depth and subtlety, and an Indiana University treasure.

2. DEFINING JAZZ EDUCATION

IU’s Jacobs School of Music has a well-deserved reputation as one of the finest schools of music in the world.

Of course, the true measure of any school can be gauged by the quality of its faculty. Over many decades, world-renowned performers and teachers including the inimitable Menahem Pressler, opera superstar Virginia Zeani, the late master cellist Janos Starker, the late violin master Josef Gingold, and many, many other legendary figures helped make the Jacobs School of Music one of the leading destinations for the most gifted music students from around the globe.

When it comes to jazz, there is one legendary figure who will forever be remembered for building at Indiana University—with the assistance of many outstanding colleagues—one of the finest jazz programs in the country, one that is known and admired around the world. And that, of course, is David Baker.

When he joined the IU faculty in 1966, David became one of the first major figures in the world of jazz to become a jazz educator.

His IU teaching career, which spanned an extraordinary 50 years, is a remarkable achievement that few can match. As chair of Jazz Studies from 1966 until 2013, David was one of the longest-serving heads of a program at Indiana University. He also rendered outstanding service to Indiana University through his work on countless university committees over those years.

His work as a teacher defined jazz education, and he shaped the lives and careers of countless professional musicians—many of whom have returned for this special evening.

His reach as an educator extended around the globe through the master classes, residencies, and workshops he conducted around the world, and through his more than 400 articles and 70 books—definitive texts used by musicians the world over.

3. A VIRTUOSIC PERFORMER, A PROLIFIC COMPOSER

When David first came to IU as a music student in the early 1950s, he trained as a classical trombonist as there was no jazz program here at that time.

After graduation, he embarked on an extraordinary career as a musician.

A dynamic trombonist, David played with many of the greats in the world of jazz.

In 1962, *Down Beat* magazine honored him with its New Star Award as an emerging jazz trombonist. In 1987, he received the magazine's Lifetime Achievement Award. You only have to listen to him on the trombone with the George Russell Sextet to realize what a prodigious talent he was.

But when an injury left him unable to play the trombone, David took up the cello, becoming a virtuoso on a second instrument. He was one of the first to use the cello in jazz.

David was also an incredibly prolific composer whose work was incredibly varied. He wrote just about every kind of musical composition imaginable in the worlds of classical and jazz, from big-band jazz pieces, to symphonies, chamber works, and choral arrangements.

4. THE BAKER FAMILY

This evening, as we celebrate David's extraordinary life and career, our heartfelt and sincere condolences go out to his wife, Lida, herself a distinguished musician, his daughter, April, and other members of his family.

Let me also say to the members of the Baker family how much all of us admire the invaluable support and strength you offered David over so many years.

5. CELEBRATING A BOLD ARTISTIC SPIRIT

Some of you may know that I have a long-held love of jazz. When I came to Indiana University 20 years ago, I was, of course, an enormous fan of David Baker's music. It was my great privilege over the last two decades to come to know David as a colleague and friend.

Tonight, in addition to his many, many achievements, we also gather to celebrate David's intellect, his kindness, his generous spirit, and his wonderful sense of humor.

Many of you were here in this very hall, exactly five years ago to the day, when we celebrated David Baker's 80th birthday with a concert featuring his music, performed by a number of his friends, colleagues, and former students. On that occasion, I had the honor of presenting David with the highest honor an IU president can bestow: the President's Medal for Excellence.

The many awards David received during his distinguished career, and his many vital contributions to the arts as a performer, composer, arranger, bandleader, conductor, and teacher are all part of his extraordinary legacy.

But tonight, we celebrate that legacy in the most fitting way possible—through David Baker's music.

His bold artistic spirit and his musical legacy will continue to move and inspire musicians and audiences for many generations to come.

Thank you