

Etta Baker Workshop

Piedmont Country Blues Guitar



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Brief Biography

At the age of three, sitting on her father's lap with his guitar lying horizontally across them, Etta Reid played her first notes on the guitar. Her father, Boone Reid, was Etta's sole, lifelong music teacher and mentor.

Born into a musical family on March 13th, 1913, Etta Lucille Reid, grew up in Caldwell County, North Carolina, one of eight children in the Reid family. Etta learned to play hymns, rags, parlor music, and Tin Pan Alley songs from her father, who had learned to play music from his father. A multi-instrumentalist, equally adept at playing piano, violin, guitar and banjo, the young Etta often played at dances and parties around Caldwell County with her father and sister.

Etta gave up most of her public performing when she married Lee Baker in 1936, but she continued to play for her family and friends and at home for her nine children.

A chance meeting in 1956 with Paul Clayton while Etta and Lee were on vacation led to Etta's first appearance on a recording. Paul Clayton was collecting field recordings when he discovered Etta. Etta, her father, and brother-in-law Lacey Phillips along with Hobart Smith and Richard Chase appeared on Clayton's record *Instrumental Music of the Southern Appalachians*. This record was said to influence many rising stars like Bob Dylan and Taj Mahal during the 60's folk revival.

After the Clayton recording Etta went back to raising her family and playing for friends and family only. Lee died in 1967, and after 24 years of working at Skyland Textile Company, Etta retired in 1973 to focus on her music.

Etta started playing festivals and concerts and in 1991 released her first album, *One Dime Blues*. Etta went on to record three more albums; the last one, an all banjo instrumental recording, was released posthumously.

Etta's two-finger style (thumb and index finger) of playing guitar follows in the tradition of

ETTA BAKER WORKSHOP - PIEDMONT COUNTRY BLUES GUITAR

other great Piedmont guitarists and fellow North Carolinians like Elizabeth Cotten and Gary Davis. Known for her beautiful arrangements and driving rhythm, Etta's guitar repertoire ranges from late 19th-century parlor music to intimation of blues music styles that would define the post-World War II urban electric blues that became popular in Chicago and Detroit and gave birth to Rock 'n Roll.

Etta received numerous honors and awards for her guitar and banjo playing throughout her late musical career, including the North Carolina Folk Heritage Award from the North Carolina Arts Council in 1989, the National Endowment for the Arts' National Heritage Fellowship in 1991, and the North Carolina Award in 2003.

Etta continued to perform well into her 90's, passing away on September 23rd, 2006 at the age 93.

Selected Bibliography

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Discography

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Music From the Hills of Caldwell County. Released 1972.

One-Dime Blues. Released 1991. Rounder Select.

The North Carolina Banjo Collection (various artists). Released 1998. Rounder.

Railroad Bill. Released 1999. Music Maker.

Etta Baker with Taj Mahal. Released 2004. Music Maker 50

Etta Baker & Cora Phillips. Released 2005. Music Maker 56

Etta Baker Banjo. Released 2009. Music Maker 109

Knoxville Rag with Kenny Wayne Shepherd. CD Title: 10 Days Out - Blues From The Backroads (also includes a DVD that shows Kenny & Etta playing guitar in her kitchen) Reprise Records, 2006. See the Ten Days Out website for more information.

Web Resources

Visit the Etta Baker Project at <http://www.ettabakerproject.com> for an expanded bibliography and a list of web resources.