

ETTA BAKER

ETTA BAKER'S ARTISTRY IS A RICH TEXTILE WOVEN BY THE FATES FROM HER PIEDMONT BLUES BACKGROUND, BLUEGRASS, COUNTRY, FOLK, SPIRITUALS AND POP MUSIC AS WELL. FAME COMES EARLY TO SOME, BUT FOR 60-SOME YEARS SHE PLAYED ONLY FOR FRIENDS, FAMILY AND PERSONAL SATISFACTION.

SHE DOESN'T SING MUCH, BUT HER FINGER-PICKING STYLE OF GUITAR PLAYING SPEAKS VOLUMES WITH ITS UNIQUE INSTRUMENTAL VOICE. AND **ETTA'S** REWORKINGS OF TRADITIONAL TUNES AND ORIGINAL COMPOSITIONS' COMPLEXITY CONFOUND LESS SKILLFUL MUSICIANS.

THE ONLY MUSIC LESSONS SHE EVER HAD WERE BACK WHEN SHE WAS ABOUT **THREE YEARS** OLD AND WATCHED HER DAD (**BOONE REID**), WHO'D CAREFULLY SHOW HER HOW HE PLACED HIS FINGERS TO FORM CHORDS.

HE TAUGHT HER UNTIL SHE WAS OLD ENOUGH TO HOLD A GUITAR ON HER OWN. HER MOM AND **SIX OTHER** SIBLINGS ALL MADE MUSIC TOO.



*Story
and Art*
BY
*Gary
Dumm*

THE MUSICAL WARP AND WOOF OF **ETTA'S** LIFE CONTINUED IN MEETING **LEE BAKER**, A PIANO PLAYER, WITH WHOM SHE PLAYED AT SQUARE DANCES AND PARTIES AROUND CALDWELL COUNTY. EVENTUALLY THEY MARRIED AND WITH STARTING A FAMILY **ETTA** GOT A JOB AT SKYLAND TEXTILES, WHERE SHE WORKED FOR **25 YEARS**. MUSIC TOOK A BACKSEAT TO FAMILY UNTIL HER **9 CHILDREN** WERE GROWN AND SHE RETIRED IN **1973**. THEN HER MUSICAL CAREER REALLY TOOK OFF.

AWAY FROM HOME SHE'S PLAYED AT FESTIVALS, SCHOOLS, SPECIAL EVENTS AND RECEIVED AWARDS SUCH AS A FOLK HERITAGE FELLOWSHIP FROM THE NEA.

HER FIRST CD "ONE-DIME BLUES" RELEASED IN **1991** HAS LED HER TO PERFORM WITH PLAYERS SUCH AS **TAJ MAHAL, DOC WATSON AND RAY CHARLES**. ALTHOUGH SLOWING DOWN AT THE AGE OF **NINETY-THREE**, THE COLOR AND RICHNESS OF HER WORK REMAINS UNFADED.