

Mp3 Sam Baker - Mercy

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everyone is at the mercy of another one's dream 12 MP3 Songs FOLK: Modern Folk, SPOKEN WORD: With Music Details: "Mercy" by Sam Baker A Review by Tony Peyser I recently heard about somebody who was riding on a train in Peru when it exploded, the result of a bomb planted by radicals in the Shining Path movement. Many people died and this guy nearly did, too. Remarkably, he's gotten on with his life. Think about that kind of determination and courage the next time you find yourself whining about something that really isn't worth whining about. Anyway, Sam Baker is a singer-songwriter of the Austin variety. The title of his debut album, Mercy, is just one word and so are each of his song titles. Baker --- who's also penned short stories --- chooses his words very carefully. The album was so highly recommended that I didn't even listen to it right way; I just read the lyrics. Baker is a vivid storyteller both in terms of what he chooses to write about and the brevity with which he brings his stories to life. Among the people who populate his songs are a husband who's lost his wife of fifty years, a wayward daughter heading home, a single mom overwhelmed in a drive-through window and other folks with hard lives looking for soft places to land. When I finally played Baker's album, its power made me stop whatever else I was doing. With a country twang and folksy, folk persona, it took a bead on my emotions and hit a bull's-eye. At times, Baker's voice seems more ragged than you'd expect from his picture on the cover the CD booklet. Baker's lyrics sometimes are run roughshod by his vocals. I also noticed a photo of him playing guitar left-handed, which certainly is a novelty. Those quirks notwithstanding, this is a record with a wounded beauty and an aching spirit. And I absolutely love it. In a couple of songs, Baker manages gently to float ghosts in and out of them. In "Kitchen," the effect is stunning. Baker ends the song filled with fleeting images of small-town life and then has four short lines to remind all of us of the subtext of our lives. His heart breaks and his voice does, too: "Skinny boys with rifles/Flying off to war/Skinny boys with rifles/Fighting door to door." I recently saw a show on The History Channel about famous war photographs over the decades. Baker's description of those young kids in Iraq is as vibrant to me as that napalmed girl in Vietnam and the flag going up over Iwo Jima. Baker's compositions are melancholy but also upbeat. "Change" has a funky front porch shine to it as he describes another (or perhaps the same)

town's main street. And those boys were still on Baker's mind: "Those same little girls/Went to work in those stores/Those same little boys went away to wars/But when they came home/All the jobs had gone away/Back to those places where they fought so far away." It's like watching Norman Rockwell's America being outsourced. The songs on Mercy hold on to those lost dreams and Baker's torn between moving on and squeezing so tight that maybe they'll come back. He gets terrific support throughout with a trio of winning female back-up singers: Britt Savage (who I reviewed on a strong album by Randy Wayne Sitzler,) Joy Lynn White (another favorite of mine) and Jessi Colter (an outlaw country legend and the longtime wife of the much-missed Waylon Jennings.) I'd be remiss if I didn't mention track 10 on Baker's album. "Steel" depicts a guy riding on a train in Machu Pichu that blows up. You see, that person I mentioned earlier was none other than Baker himself. He's had many surgeries since then. The reason some of Baker's vocals are raspy is because that blast affected his hearing, He plays guitar left-handed because of other injuries he sustained. A near-death event like this is clearly life-altering. It explains why Baker's songs have such depth and resonance. In "Angels," the chorus is especially haunting: "Call a truce/Call a war/Everyone is a bastard/Everyone is a whore/Everyone is a saint/Everyone is redeemed/Everyone is at the mercy of another one's dream." This is big, poetic stuff but Baker serves it up not on a gold platter but more like a cafeteria tray, which everyone can relate to. I don't think it's premature to think of Baker as being part of the hallowed singer-songwriter tradition blazed by the likes of Townes Van Zant, Guy Clark and John Prine. It's like there was a storm, a couple of huge oaks fell down at your local park and you suddenly saw another big tree behind them in full bloom. In a music world riddled with deadwood, Sam Baker is a redwood.

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