

The friendly folk at Rounder Records

By Steve Morse
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No one is perfect. And no record label is perfect, though judging from this film, Cambridge's Rounder Re-

Movie Review

records is as close to perfect as a label can get. "True Believers" is an unshamedly positive, but still highly entertaining, film about a label started by folk idealists who often led with their hearts, not their bank accounts.

Rounder is celebrating its 25th anniversary since being founded by Tufts University graduates who fell under the spell of Southern blues and bluegrass, then other regional styles. Founders Ken Irwin, Marian Levy and Bill Nowlin are interviewed at length in this immensely loving documentary by award-winning director Robert Mugge, whose films include "Gospel According to Al Green" and "The Kingdom of Zydeco."

There's no coverage of Rounder's occasional problems through the years, such as friction when workers tried to organize a union opposed by the once-hippie owners, or complaints from some artists that the label didn't do enough to distribute their records.

Rounder is no longer a small, grass-roots operation - its Cambridge offices now boast 109 employees - but the company remains the label of choice for roots music acts such as Alison Krauss, Beau Jocque, Marcia Ball and Steve Riley & the Mamou Playboys. All of them - and many more - perform in this compelling jewel of a film, which also serves as a valuable primer for anyone seeking a quick fix on the roots scene.

The performances are captivating. Krauss, whom Rounder first discovered at age 13, exhibits her fiddle brilliance in a live radio broadcast in Pennsylvania. Cajun accordionist Bruce Daigrepoint is caught at a festival on his home turf in Louisiana, while zydeco star Beau Jocque kicks up a storm in a Louisiana dance hall with his James Brown-infused vocals.



Fiddler Alison Krauss, a Rounder discovery, in "True Believers."

TRUE BELIEVERS: The Musical Family of Rounder Records
Directed and produced by: Robert Mugge
At: Coolidge Corner Theatre
Unrated

In addition, guitarist Little Jimmy King (Albert King's grandson) and pianist Ron Levy (director of Rounder's Bullseye Blues subsidiary) are on fire in a studio session. Marcia Ball plays Jerry Lee-style boogie-woogie onstage in her Austin club, La Zona Rosa. Irma Thomas sings from her club in New Orleans (the funky Lions Den Lounge) and New England's Bill Morrissey nearly steals the movie with two concert tunes and wry quips about how Rounder lets you record what you want, though if you want to use trumpets you should say they're "Appalachian traditional fretless trumpets" to please their purist image.

It's easy to knock this film as too gushy, but Rounder has had a lot to gush about. Through the years, the label has signed some extraordinary artists - and their musical genius is what makes this film shine. The bonus is that the Rounder founders come across as savvy, upbeat presences as well.

The movie will show for at least a week; director Mugge will be at the Coolidge Corner Theatre Monday night at 7:15 to introduce that night's screening. Three of his other films - "Kingdom of Zydeco," "Gather at the River" and "Gospel According to Al Green" - will play during the week. Next Thursday, former Coolidge Corner owner Justin Freed will discuss the time that Green actually visited the theater.

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June 23-29th:
TRUE BELIEVERS
The Musical Family of Rounder Records

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GATHER AT THE RIVER

June 25, 28 & 29th:
THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO AL GREEN

June 26th & 27th:
THE KINGDOM OF ZYDECO

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