

In 1970 the initial wave of folk labels of the Sixties was becoming less active and changing direction. The three friends who set up Rounder, Ken Irwin, Marian Leighton and Bill Nowlin, felt that there was much fine music being overlooked and left unrecorded so they set out to do something about it.

As befitting its name, after the original tramps, hobos, and boxcar bums of the Twenties, Rounder Records was literally born on the road. The first two summers together the Rounder trio spent trucking along back roads and highways, primarily in the Southeast, seeking out first generation bluegrass and stringband musicians while visiting collectors and folklorists, selling records at folk and bluegrass festivals, and running a mail order business out of their V.W. bus.

Each fall they'd return home to Somerville, Mass. where they operated the record, distribution and mail order business out of a small apartment that they shared. For the first four years they could not afford to pay themselves salaries and at least one of the three was working to support the household. Nonetheless, Rounder continued to grow as the company outgrew two successive apartments, the basement of a house they brought in 1973, and eventually settled into the warehouse where they are working today.

Gradually as a whole new group of labels and distributors of bluegrass, progressive country, and blues began popping up, Rounder began to diversify and became more aggressive in promotion, publicity and packaging of its product. The phenomenal success of George Thorogood and The Destroyers then focused international attention on the small "new" label. After numerous major signing, distribution and production offers, Thorogood decided to stay with Rounder which in turn chose to remain independent.

In 1980 Rounder earned its first gold record with George Thorogood's "Move It On Over" LP (which also went platinum in Canada on Attic Records). However, the difficult economic conditions had their effect on the label. The Rounder group decided not to try and compete in the "commercial" market as much as to re-emphasize the more modest but solid avenues of music that have built and been the basis of the label. Their present release schedule consists of a majority of "roots music of various types" with some emphasis on blues and bluegrass music.

This year the label will begin projects on such well known artists as John Hammond, Sleepy LaBeef, The Persuations, London Wainwright III, Steve Young, Riders In The Sky, and The Johnson Mountain Boys as well as to continue to work with their previously signed artists including Norman Blake, Tony Rice, J.D. Crowe, Mark O'Connor, Joe Val, Hazel Dickens, Vernon Oxford, NRBQ, Arlen Roth, Bob Paisley, The Dry Branch Fire Squad, East Virginia, George Thorogood, Bela Fleck, Butch Robbins, Guy Van Duser, Bill Keith, and on and on.

The Rounder philosophy can best be summed up in a press release from the label which notes, ".... we've continued to issue albums that let people know about the traditions from which today's music comes."

PUBLISHERS  
&  
A&R DIRECTORS

USE

**new on the charts**

TO FIND

PRODUCERS  
&  
MANAGERS

## WHO'S WHO IN A&R AT ROUNDER RECORDS

The three friends and partners who started ROUNDER RECORDS, KEN IRWIN, MARIAN LEIGHTON, and BILL NOWLIN still function jointly in making A&R decisions and approve or disapprove projects by consensus. Last fall the three celebrated their first ten years of working together. However, as the company has grown to a catalogue of over two hundred fifty records, some divisions of labor have evolved.

KEN IRWIN supervises on-going artist relations, scheduling studio time, auditioning song demos, consulting on material to be recorded, and often working with artists in the studio.

MARIAN LEIGHTON has generally come to supervise publicity and promotional activities, while still working closely with Ken on artist relations. Over a year ago, MARY WEBER joined Rounder's staff to take charge of day-to-day promotion and assist in many other areas as well.

BILL NOWLIN acts as director of business affairs, making licensing and distribution agreements, and negotiating contractual and legal agreements. DUNCAN BROWNE came to the company nearly two years ago in the capacity of distribution manager and liaison person to the network of independent distributors who carry Rounder in other parts of the country.



Bill Nowlin

Marian Leighton

Ken Irwin