

# BALCONY RELEASING

Reckon So Productions  
and  
Ghost Robot

present

# DR. BRONNER'S MAGIC SOAPBOX



## Production Notes

Publicity materials available for download at:

[www.magicsoapbox.com/pubstills](http://www.magicsoapbox.com/pubstills)

Running Time: 88 minutes

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" a complex portrait of a man who cares more for humanity than for his own children,"  
- **New York Times**

"Sara Lamm's modest yet moving doc—outweirds fiction." - **Time Out**

"...makes for a fascinating documentary" - **NY Magazine**

" An unforgettable narrative of endurance and family ties." - **Very Short List**

" Bronner's life is the stuff that movies are made of" - **Tree Hugger.com**

"the documentary leaves you feeling hopeful and tingly all over. " - **Slant Magazine**



## “Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soapbox”

Directed by  
Sara Lamm

A documentary about uniting mankind,  
one bottle of soap at a time.

### Featuring

Counterculture hero and master chemist

**Dr. E.H. Bronner**

Who printed his “**ALL ONE!**” philosophy  
on millions of bottles of all-natural, all-purpose,  
always-tingly peppermint soap!!!

[www.magicsoapbox.com](http://www.magicsoapbox.com)





## SHORT SYNOPSIS

**“Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soapbox”** is a timely portrait of a socially responsible, all-natural soap company and the family that runs it. The documentary is offbeat and irreverent, ultimately revealing the abiding compassion underlying Dr. Bronner’s insistent message—**“We’re All-One or None!”**

German-born **Dr. Emanuel H. Bronner** was a master soapmaker, chemist, self-proclaimed rabbi, and, allegedly, **Albert Einstein's** nephew. In 1948, after escaping from a mental institution and hitchhiking to California, he invented **Dr. Bronner's Magic Soap**, a peppermint-infused, all-natural, multi-purpose liquid—now the #1 selling certified organic soap in North America and Japan. To each bottle, Bronner attached an ever-evolving set of teachings he called ‘**The Moral ABC,**’ over 30,000 words that he designed '**TO UNITE ALL MANKIND AND SPACESHIP EARTH!**'

With a background in multi-media performance art and documentary, director **Sara Lamm** finds the bittersweet upside of a complicated, sometimes painful, family story. Moving back-and-forth between archival 16mm film of Dr. Bronner and contemporary footage of his son **Ralph Bronner** (AKA The Son of “The Pope of Soap”), the film captures four generations of soapmakers and the inspiring legacy of the *counterculture’s* favorite cleaning product.

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***March 2007 marks the 10-year Anniversary of Dr. Bronner’s passing.***

***2008 marks the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of  
Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soaps, founded in 1948.***

***2008 also marks the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the opening of the  
first Bronner family soap factory in Germany.***





## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In the Fall of 2000, I adapted and staged **Dr. E.H. Bronner's** famous soap label as part of a series of live comedic “found text” performances in New York City. When I wrote to **Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps** asking if they would donate their pepperminty product to my theater group, I was astonished not just to receive a huge box, but also multiple personal phone calls from company VP, **Ralph Bronner** himself.

The more I learned about both Ralph and his father, Dr. Bronner, the more impressed I was by the surprising and creative ways that each managed to transform his own suffering into a desire to relieve the suffering of others. Using soap, manifestos, and indomitable spirits, they have created consistent change in people's lives. Eventually, I met **David** and **Mike Bronner**, who also engage their grandfather's ideals—fighting legal battles against the **USDA** in order to maintain credible *organic standards* in the U.S. body care industry, challenging the **DEA** on *hemp regulation*, and initiating a **Fair Trade Olive Oil Project** that encourages peaceful coexistence in Israel and Palestine. Their shared paradigm of “**Constructive Capitalism**,” where, as Dr. Bronner insisted, “**You share the profit with the workers and the Earth**,” is becoming more and more of a reality for the company every day.

In addition to documenting the history of an unusual family and a tingly soap, my goal with “**Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox**” has been to offer an opportunity to consider a different kind of business model—one that allows for both social responsibility and human interaction.

In retrospect, my shock at Ralph's first phone calls points to a disturbing fact about modern life—that products and companies generally feel like disembodied entities, amorphous enterprises surrounded by walls of computerized responses and form letters. This disconnect fuels a sense that *no one is actually there*, which contributes to an atmosphere in which no one feels obliged to take responsibility for unsustainable and dehumanizing business practices.

This is not exactly a political movie, in the sense that it doesn't lobby in an obvious way for a particular kind of change. It's sad and funny and weird and even sometimes uncomfortable—these qualities have always been my favorites for the way they help open the backdoor to questions *like “What is our obligation to one another?”* and “*What can one individual do?*” When we began filming in 2002, the **Enron/Arthur Anderson/WorldCom** corporate scandals were in the papers every day, America was heading to war in Iraq, and I began to see this project as a kind of balm—or maybe an odd-tasting tonic—a bit of relief from consistently troubling and overwhelming news.

**It is my hope that the “Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox” expands and questions our current notions of just what exactly might go into—using Dr. B's words—  
“SAVING SPACESHIP EARTH.”**

- Sara Lamm





## LONG SYNOPSIS

*Filmmaker Sara Lamm's "Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox" is a timely portrait of a socially responsible all-natural soap company and the family that runs it. The film is offbeat and irreverent, ultimately revealing the abiding compassion beneath*

*Dr. Bronner's insistent message:*

***"We're ALL-ONE OR NONE!"***

"Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox" opens with archival film footage of Dr. Emanuel H. Bronner, bathing with his minty soap, which, he says, keeps him feeling young. *"I'm supposed to be seventy-six—I feel like twenty-six!"* Flash forward to current day, and we see 70-year old son Ralph Bronner telling a stranger about his father's life mission—to teach everyone that *"we are all children of the same God and we should care for each other and this planet."*

The film reveals the inspiring and complex family history of an all-natural liquid soap that has remained popular for almost 60 years, while also shedding light on the concept of **"Constructive Capitalism."**

Emanuel Bronner was born in Germany to a Jewish family of soapmakers in 1908. Educated in the guild system, and achieving the degree of *Master Soapmaker*, he immigrated to America at the age of 21 with the hope of finding work and spreading what he called **"Bronner's Peace Plan."** His sense of urgency intensified during World War II, when the Nazis killed his parents and nationalized the family soap plant. By 1946, he was traveling widely throughout the United States, preaching some unconventional (and sometimes difficult to follow) ideas. Dr. Bronner's more original philosophies, and the fervor with which he publicized them, landed him in an Illinois insane asylum, where he was given shock treatment and formally declared "psychotic."

Bronner was undeterred. He escaped the asylum, twice, and eventually hitchhiked to California, where, in the back of a rundown Los Angeles tenement hotel, he began mixing vats of his newest invention—a tingly, all-natural peppermint soap. On each and every bottle he stenciled his ever-evolving plan for uniting mankind under **"ONE EVER-LOVING GOD!"** and **"ALL-ONE-GOD-FAITH!"**

Bronner sunbathed nude and ate raw eggshells. He railed against communists, made frequent phone calls to the FBI, studied revolutionary **Thomas Paine** and lectured against water fluoridation. And, occasionally, he would check in on the three children he had abandoned in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Bronner settled in Escondido, CA and adopted the moniker "Dr."—as a master chemist soapmaker, the title was equivalent to a German Ph.D. in chemistry.

Dr. Bronner's middle son, Ralph, endured 15 orphanages and foster homes in the first seven years of his life, before finally settling down with a permanent foster family. Despite Ralph's difficult memories, he is his father's most ardent fan. A modern-day troubadour, he drives his minivan-cum-*Soap Mobile* to small theaters and assembly halls all over the country, giving away bottles of soap, and performing the one-man





**“Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soap Show,”** a tribute to his father, featuring folk songs and improvised storytelling.

Ralph seems to have inherited more than a few of his father’s eccentric qualities. He stops people at newsstands, in hotel lobbies, and even in cemeteries, to proclaim the good news that, although Dr. Bronner passed away in 1997, the family members who run the company have no intention of selling out. He channels Dr. Bronner’s passionate energy and eagerly announces that the company sells more than six million bottles a year, with over 70% of net profits going to help environmental and humanitarian causes.

Sara Lamm shows us how each member of the Bronner clan has a particular way of embodying Dr. Bronner’s message. The sum total is a group of people who make a connection between how they behave and the welfare of all of us.

Ralph acknowledges that people think his father was crazy and that he himself might be a little crazy too. “If dad had been normal, you wouldn’t be on the phone talking to me. There would have been no soap with 30,000 words on the label; there would be no visionary company giving away its profits. We need more crazy people.” (As quoted in **San Diego Magazine**, February 2007.)

The iconic blue and white label plays a significant part in graphic design of the film, appearing as chapter markers throughout and framing the colorful cast of “soap fans” who describe their first encounters with Dr. Bronner’s. One counterculture soap-user even rates Dr. Bronner up there on his list of the four most influential people in the world, alongside **John Lennon**, **Dennis Hopper**, and **Frank Zappa**.

In addition to Dr. Bronner and Ralph, the documentary features Dr. Bronner’s fourth wife **Gladys Bronner**, late son **Jim Bronner**, grandsons **David Bronner** (president, Bronner’s Soaps) and **Mike Bronner** (VP, Bronner’s Soaps), daughter-in law **Trudy Bronner** (CFO, Bronner’s Soaps), friend **Eldridge Cleaver** of the Black Panthers, and musician **Keith Waa**.

“Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soapbox” is directed and produced by Lamm, produced by **Zachary Mortensen** and **Cheri Anderson**, executive produced by **Matt Aselton** and edited by **Katy Finch**, with original music by **Pierre De Gaillande**.





## PRODUCTION NOTES

Sara Lamm began working on her first film, “Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soapbox,” after creating a live performance piece based on the *Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soap* label. When she wrote to the Company, asking them to donate soap to her theater, Ralph Bronner, son of Dr. Bronner, not only called her personally to say that soap was on its way, but he also sent her a card with a fifty-dollar bill and the note: **“My random act of kindness—go out to dinner on me!”**

In Sara’s words:

*After my performances, Ralph stayed in touch—calling to thank me for the videotape of the show. And then, in September 2001, he made a request: would I please take 15 cases of soap to **Ground Zero** and hand them out to local residents? It seemed ludicrous, in the face of all of our confusion and grief, but Ralph was adamant. **“I believe in working on the human level,”** he said, kind of convincing me, **“Everyone needs soap.”** I took up the challenge, and was intrigued to realize that after carting all those (very heavy) boxes downtown and striking up several (awkward) conversations with strangers, something inside me had shifted—“The Hippie Spaceship Soap,” as one friend called it, was opening a pathway for me to become more intimately connected with my community. (This story became a radio piece for **WNYC’s “The Next Big Thing.”**)*

*Not long after that, Ralph announced that he was coming to New York to perform his “Magic Soap Show,” an improvised night of storytelling and songs. That’s when we began making “Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soapbox.”*

In 2002, Sara and cinematographer Andrew Nagata set out with a video camera and a couple of microphones to capture Ralph’s unique energy.

Ralph, like his father before him, is more available than you’re average multi-million dollar business owner. He prints his *home* phone number on every piece of corporate literature, hugs nearly everyone he comes across, and personally gives away vanloads of soap—one bottle at a time.

While shooting Ralph in New York City, **Robert Kennedy Jr.** and his wife **Mary** visited Ralph in his hotel room to thank him for donating soap to the **Riverkeeper** organization. The scene ended up on the cutting room floor, alas, a fact that Ralph still complains about to this day. In fact, Ralph has rubbed elbows with plenty of high profile people that are “nuts about the soap”—from **Arlo Guthrie** and **James Taylor** to **Patch Adams**.

The “Magic Soapbox” team also met musician and soap fan **Keith Waa** at Ralph’s hotel. He was living down the hall, caring for his girlfriend, **Cyrinda Fox**, a legendary figure on the 70s music scene, who was in hospice care dying of cancer. The scene of Ralph and Keith sharing music and conversation is at the heart of the movie. Sara and Ralph were both moved to find out later that Cyrinda lived several months after the scene in Keith’s room and that Keith married her just 10 days before she passed





away. He called Ralph after watching an early cut of the film to say that he was appreciative of the time he spent with Ralph and grateful to have that particular moment in his life memorialized.

Ralph gave Sara total access to the family archives, including *hundreds of hours* of audiotapes that Dr. Bronner recorded. He taped phone conversations, notes to himself, and seemingly infinite versions of “The Moral ABC,” which he tended to recite in the wee hours of the night.

Ralph also gave Sara access to the **FBI** files on his dad, recovered by a family friend through the **Freedom of Information Act**. Ralph had never looked through the papers and was sure that they would document the FBI's obsession with Dr. Bronner's radical political ideas. It came as a revelation that Dr. Bronner had been calling the FBI all those years—not the other way around.

About two years into the project, Sara got a surprising phone call from Stewart Nelsen, another filmmaker, who had started but not finished a documentary about the company in the early 1980s. Stewart had heard Sara's radio piece and it revived his interest in the footage (which was in cans under his bed). He tracked Sara through the Bronner family, and she was eventually able to license the 16mm archive from him. Ralph had mostly still photographs of Dr. Bronner, and the addition of the film footage greatly expanded the scope of the project.

“Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox” was independently financed, with many, many people working for free or for a miniscule portion of their day rate. Often people would get involved in the film because they were already big fans of the soap itself. No contributions were made by the Bronner's or their company, even though Ralph constantly tried to slip “Random Acts of Kindness!” into Sara's pocket.

## Filmmaker Biographies

### Sara Lamm - Producer/Director

“**Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox**” director **Sara Lamm** has been working with various forms of live performance-based and radio documentary for ten years. In New York City, she produced, directed, and performed in a variety of multimedia performances, featuring audio collage, video and still photography. One of her theater events was the impetus for a long-standing relationship with **Ralph Bronner**, CEO of **Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps**. Her previous work has been presented at **PS NBC** (a showcase space for NBC), **The New York International Fringe Festival**, **Chashama**, **Surf Reality**, **The Atlantic Theater**, **The 24 Hour Plays** and on **National Public Radio's “The Next Big Thing.”** Originally from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, she attended the **University of North Carolina**, where she graduated with highest honors in Performance Studies. “Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox” is her first documentary film. Lamm resides in Los Angeles and is currently creating an eco-awareness project titled “**10 do 10.**”



## Filmmaker Biographies (continued)

### Zachary Mortensen – Producer

New York-based **Zachary Mortensen** produced “**Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soapbox.**” Prior, he produced the narrative feature “**Choking Man**” by iconoclastic music video director **Steve Barron**, which premiered at the **Tribeca Film Festival**. The film stars **Eugenia Yuan, Octavio Gomez Berrios** and **Mandy Patinkin**. Mortensen’s feature “**Road,**” by director **Leslie McCleave**, premiered at the 2005 **Los Angeles Film Festival** where it was awarded outstanding performance for both leads (**Catherine Kellner** and **Ebon Moss-Bachrach**), and was theatrically released in 2006. Mortensen recently produced the award-winning documentary features “**Breath Control: The History of the Human Beat Box**” and “**The Federation of Black Cowboys.**” In 2001, he produced the feature documentary “**Hell House,**” by director **George Ratliff**, which premiered at the **Toronto International Film Festival** and was released theatrically in 2002. Mortensen also produced the theatrical documentary “**Stoked: The Rise and Fall of Gator,**” directed by **Helen Stickler**. Previously, Mortensen was the Director of Production at **Caipirinha Productions** where he supervised the post-production and distribution of the critically acclaimed documentary feature “**Modulations.**” Mortensen continues to produce commercials, music videos and television—recently wrapping commercials for **Comcast, Coca Cola** and **Digitarian**, as well as music videos for **Zero 7, The New Year** and **The Old 97’s**, and numerous episodes of **Fox Television’s “Americas Most Wanted.”**

### Katy Finch – Editor

**Katy Finch** has been editing for five years, working in film for nine years in New York, and making movies since second grade. In 2004, Katy edited “**Damian Loeb: In the Public Domain**” which premiered at the **GenArt Film Festival**. Her independent documentaries, “**For the Kids,**” “**Cannibal Countess,**” “**Moyglass Summer**” and “**Behind the Psychic**” have screened at **Anthology Film Archives, The Pioneer Theater, Rooftop Films** and on **Streamedia.com**. As an editor and cinematographer, her work has been seen on **MTV, CMT, NHK**, the **Brooklyn International Film Festival** and the **IFP Marketplace**. In addition to working on films, Katy published the independent ‘zine **Falsies** from 1996 to 2004, which was self-distributed nationwide.

### Pierre de Gaillande – Composer

**Pierre de Gaillande** is a composer and multi-instrumentalist born in Paris, France. He is the principal songwriter, singer and guitarist for the band **Melomane**, who released their third CD, **Glaciers** in April 2006. Melomane’s music has appeared on “**The Osbournes,**” “**Daria,**” “**Road Rules,**” “**VH1 All Access**” and the **Discovery Channel**, among others. Pierre also recently backed acclaimed singer/songwriter **Vic Chesnutt** on guitar, trumpet, keyboards, and vocals in New York for a run of sold-out shows. Other collaborations include music for dance performances with Uruguayan choreographer **Luciana Achugar**, for which he won a “Meet the Composer” grant, and Israeli composer **Ori Flomin**. In addition, Pierre tours with the **Polyester Prince Film Festival** in Europe and the US, doing musical accompaniment for silent films.





## Dr. Bronner's Social Responsibility

### **Serving Our Community and Spaceship Earth** *(Excerpt from Co. website)*

In total over the last five years, Dr. Bronner's charitable gifting to social and environmental causes has roughly matched our total after-tax income, and we intend to keep doing so as circumstances allow.

Total compensation of executives is capped at five times that of our lowest-paid position.

Employees annually receive 15% of salary paid into a retirement/profit-sharing plan, up to 25% of salary as a bonus, and a no-deductible PPO health insurance plan for themselves and their families.

The over 30,000 words spread across all the soap labels were Dr. Bronner's life work of searching every religion and philosophy for "**Full Truths**" that can be summed up in two beautiful sentences:

1. Constructive capitalism is where you share the profit with the workers and the earth from which you made it!
2. We are all brothers and sisters and we should take care of each other and spaceship earth!

In following these principles, the Bronner family gives much of its profits to "Human Projects" all over Spaceship Earth - from fresh water wells in Ghana to orphanages in Haiti and China; from helping organic farm projects to donating over 1,200 acres of land to the **San Diego County Boys and Girls Club**. We have given large amounts of soap to homeless shelters, **Phoenix House** and many other worthwhile projects.

In sharing with our workers, we annually give profit-sharing and bonuses totaling over \$10,000 per employee for warehouse positions. Dr. Bronner would be happy to know the business is running better and more socially responsibly than ever.

To support sustainable agriculture, farm-worker health and ecological processing methods, Dr. Bronner's soaps are now all made with organic oils certified under the **USDA's** organic food regulations by **Oregon Tilth**. Dr. Bronner's is supporting the **Organic Consumers Association's "Coming Clean"** campaign for strong organic body care standards.

*For further information on Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps clean policies on **Animal Testing** and the benefits of **Industrial Hemp**, please see this complete web page at:*

[http://www.drbronner.com/drbr\\_socialresponsibility.html](http://www.drbronner.com/drbr_socialresponsibility.html)





## Cast Biographies

### **Dr. Emanuel H. Bronner, Founder of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps A Life Dedicated to God, Mankind and Spaceship Earth**

*(Excerpt from the Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps Website)*

Emanuel Bronner (1908 -1997) was a third generation master soapmaker from an orthodox Jewish family in Heilbronn, Germany, where he was certified under the rigorous guild system of the time. He was the heir to the family's soap factory and business, but rebelled against his father and came to the United States in the late 1920's. After the Nazis nationalized the soap factory in 1938, his parents and most of his family died in the Holocaust. Dr. Bronner had three children (Jim, Ralph and Ellen) with his first wife, a Catholic hotel maid, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Dr. Bronner initially worked as a consultant to various soap companies in the U.S. However, most such companies were converting to the complicated synthetic surfactant formulations that comprise modern body care products, so he struck out on his own in the late '40s. His ecological castile soaps and message of peace resonated powerfully with the counterculture of the '60s and '70s, and he became an icon of the time. His essential vision and philosophy were born out of the fate of his family and the Holocaust, and are emphatic that we are all children of the same divine source. Dr. Bronner was also grounded in a powerful ecological consciousness, and the soaps were an extension of this—simple, natural and 100% environment-friendly. He passed away peacefully on March 7, 1997, amidst family and friends.

### **Ralph Bronner, Son of “The Pope of Soap” & VP of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps**

Ralph Bronner, who is 70-years-old, endured 15 orphanages and foster homes in the first seven years of his life, before finally settling down with a permanent foster family in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He visited his father off and on during adolescence and early adulthood, and in the 1950s, while a student at the University of Wisconsin, answered his father's urgent call to “Come and help out with the bills.” Expecting to find his father in thousands of dollars of debt, he was surprised to find that Dr. Bronner needed someone to help keep track of the money *coming in*. Since Ralph could also type, he was elected to take his father's lengthy dictations of the “Moral ABC,” which changed constantly. Needing a break, he soon returned to Milwaukee where he married his wife Gisele, had three sons, and taught at an inner-city school. In later years, after Dr. Bronner had gone blind and was suffering from Parkinson's, Ralph spent more time helping out with the business. But his biggest job is carrying on his father's mission for a unified world. He is also sending out his own version of the message: STAY HUMAN. Ralph plays guitar and has helped run a non-profit coffee house for 33 years.

**Gladys Bronner** was the fourth wife of Dr. E.H. Bronner. She continues to live in Escondido, California.





**David Bronner, President of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps** Dr. Bronner's grandson David Bronner has been president of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps since 1998. He pioneered the use of 100% post-consumer recycled PET bottles for the liquid soaps and a hemp/recycled paper blend to package the soap bars. Under David's leadership, in 2003, Dr. Bronner's was one of the first brands to certify all soaps, lotions and balms under the **USDA National Organic Program**. The Company is currently building and coordinating certified fair trade projects for all major ingredients, including olive oil from the West Bank and Israel, coconut oil from Sri Lanka, and palm oil from Ghana. David was the main coordinator of the **Hemp Industries Association's** (HIA) successful multi-year litigation against **the Drug Enforcement Administration** to protect sales of Hemp foods and body care in the United States (2001-04). He is a board member of both the HIA and **Vote Hemp**, and is working to bring back hemp farming in the US. During high school and college summers, David worked for his father Jim's consulting company, **Bronner Chemical**. David graduated with a B.A. in Biology from **Harvard University** in 1995, and was a mental health counselor afterward in the Boston area for two years, before joining Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps in 1997. Born in Los Angeles in 1973, he now lives in Encinitas, California with his wife Kris and daughter Maya. He enjoys coaching his daughter's soccer team and dancing late into the night.

**Trudy Bronner, Co-Owner and Chief Financial Officer, Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps** Trudy Bronner has been CFO of Dr. Bronner's since 1993. Upon the death of Dr. Bronner, she guided the company onto firm financial footing by coordinating the payment of \$2.5 million in inheritance taxes. Since that time, sales have more than tripled. Trudy was a junior high school math teacher before her children were born, and while raising her three children, she was the treasurer of 15 different volunteer organizations, often at the same time. Trudy also currently oversees the management of Dr. Bronner's Family Foundation, a 501(c)3 corporation funded by the profits of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps. Trudy received a degree in Mathematics from the **University of Redlands**, where she also received a Distinguished Alumni Award in 2006. She has also been honored by the **Boys and Girls Club** of Greater San Diego with the prestigious "**Kid for Life**" Award, as well as by the City of Escondido with a **Community Service Award**. She serves the community as a member of the Board of Directors of the Boys and Girls Club of Greater San Diego and **the Escondido Community Foundation**. She is also very involved in her Presbyterian church where she is Deacon Moderator. A mother of three, Trudy enjoys spending time with her three grandchildren, playing mah-jongg and is an avid sports fan.

**Michael Bronner, Vice-President of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps**

Dr. Bronner's grandson Michael Bronner became Vice-President of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps in 2000, and is primarily responsible for the company's international expansion in recent years. Under his leadership, sales of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps in Japan, South Korea, and other international markets grew from less than 1% to 12% of the company's revenue. In Japan, Dr. Bronner's is now the top-selling natural brand of soap after just a few years of being on the market, and the lip balm is the number one selling natural lip balm. A large part of Dr. Bronner's success in the Japanese market is due to Michael's deep understanding of Japanese culture and business practices he gained from living there for three years after college as a junior high school English teacher. Michael currently serves on the **District Export Council**





in San Diego, an organization of leaders from the local business community that works with the **U.S. Commercial Service** to supply specialized expertise to small and medium-sized businesses that are interested in exporting. Today, Michael is taking a leadership role in opening new markets for Dr. Bronner's in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. Michael was born in 1975 in Los Angeles and lives in Encinitas, CA. Michael has a degree in English from **Brown University**. He enjoys snowboarding, finding time in both his and his girlfriend's busy schedules to hang out together, and participating in his local Toastmasters club.

**James Albert Bronner, Former President of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps**

Born the younger of two sons to Dr. Emanuel Bronner in 1938, Jim Bronner spent over 30 years overseeing Dr. Bronner's soap production, and from 1965 to 1988 was Vice-President and Technical Director of **Sanitek**, a Los Angeles chemical specialties company. Among other projects, Jim developed a superior fire-fighting foam that is still in wide-spread use today on forest and structure fires around the country. He also developed a variation of the fire-fighting foam called **Snofoam**, which was used to make ecological artificial snow in Hollywood movies and television shows. Beginning in 1988, he founded and ran his own consulting company, **Bronner Chemical**. When Dr. Bronner fell ill in the early 1990's, Jim steered the company out of bankruptcy, effectively saving the company. He became president of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps in 1994, taking over from his father. Upon Dr. Bronner's death in 1997, Jim coordinated the donation of more than a thousand acres of rural land in east San Diego County valued at \$1.4 million, to the Boys & Girls Club of Escondido, the largest land donation in their history. Under Jim Bronner's stewardship, the company initiated many of the progressive employee benefit programs that exist today: 15% profit sharing, 100% employer-paid zero-deductible health care for employees and families, and generous bonus packages. Jim served in the United States Navy from 1955 to 1960 and was on active reserve until 1971. He was married to Trudy in 1968 and is the father of David, Michael and Lisa. An avid soccer coach and history buff, as well as consummate sailor and bridge player, Jim always put his family and the welfare of others first. Jim died on June 12, 1998.

**Eldridge Cleaver** (1935 – 1998) helped found the Black Panthers in 1966 and was the group's information minister. In 1968, essays outlining his views on racial issues and revolutionary violence were published as the book "Soul on Ice," which became the philosophical foundation of the Black Power movement. Like Dr. Bronner, Cleaver was also inspired by revolutionary Thomas Paine and the power of the written word.

**Rosemarie Landry** has adopted over 30 special needs children in her lifetime. One of her family friends contacted Ralph years ago requesting soap for Rosemarie and the kids. Ralph sent soap, and he also decided to visit. He has been stopping by for years, playing his guitar and singing folk songs for the children.

**Keith Waa** is a New York-based musician that represents one of the thousands of lives that Ralph Bronner and his soap touch on a daily basis. Keith was staying at the same hotel as Ralph while caring for his dying girlfriend, who was in hospice care.





## END CREDITS

<b>Director</b>	SARA LAMM
<b>Producers</b>	SARA LAMM ZACHARY MORTENSEN CHERI ANDERSON
<b>Editor</b>	KATY FINCH
<b>Camera</b>	ANDREW NAGATA, SARA LAMM
<b>Archival Footage Directed &amp; Produced by</b>	STEWART NELSEN
<b>Graphic Design</b>	DMITRI SIEGEL
<b>Original Music</b>	PIERRE DEGAILLANDE
<b>Executive Producer</b>	MATT ASELTON
<b>Associate Producers</b>	BRENT COX YANA COLLINS LEHMAN

## FEATURING:

Dr. Bronner  
Ralph Bronner  
Jim Bronner  
Trudy Bronner  
Mike Bronner  
David Bronner  
Gladys Bronner  
Eldridge Cleaver  
Gail Tripp  
P.R. White  
Keith Waa  
Dolly Scanlan  
Chet Rohn  
Rabbi Burt A. Siegel  
Rosemarie Landry and Family  
Robbie Landry





**Also Appearing:**

Brigitte Mars  
Susie Fish  
Nat Pierce  
Desirée Palmer  
Jesse Brown  
Milo MacTavish  
Jerald Hissim  
Erik Rothenberg  
Lenda Hand  
Alvin Glatowski

and

ED

<b>Voice of Luise Bronner</b>	Angelika Saint-Aignan
<b>FBI voice</b>	Matt Aselton
<b>additional camera</b>	Jan Young
<b>assistant editor</b>	Chris Angel
<b>additional graphic design</b>	Jeffrey Lai
<b>sound design FBI sequence</b>	Marianne McCune
<b>Online Facility</b>	OFFHOLLYWOOD DIGITAL
<b>Colorist</b>	Joseph Mastantuono
<b>Sound Post Facility</b>	hsr/ny
<b>Re-recording Mixers</b>	Tom Gehring Chad Roucroft
<b>Production Legal</b>	Brent Cox
<b>Transcriptions</b>	Andrea Gallo
<b>Trailer</b>	Cut + Run My Active Driveway
<b>Editors</b>	Manya Mendyuk Chuck Wills
<b>Assistant editor</b>	Kevin Grassman
<b>Creative Supervisor</b>	Steve Choo

Original Music Composed and Performed by  
Pierre de Gaillande  
© 2005 Pierre de Gaillande

**MUSICIANS:**

Pedal Steel and Dobro: Gerald Menke  
Violin: Catherine McCrae  
Vocals: Hilary Downes  
Piano: Fred Cassidy





**Music:**

"Aria in D"  
Performed by Melomane  
Words and Music by Daria Grace and Quentin  
Jennings  
From the album "Solresol"

"Unfriendly Skies"  
Performed by Melomane  
Words and Music by Pierre de Gaillande  
From the album "Glaciers Will Fade Away"

"Hilarious"  
Performed by Melomane  
Words and Music by Pierre de Gaillande  
From the album "Glaciers Will Fade Away"

"Just Because"  
Performed by Melomane  
Words and Music by Pierre de Gaillande and  
Quentin Jennings  
From the album "Resolvo"

DR. BRONNER'S MAGIC SOAP SONG  
Words by Tom Zachek  
Performed by Ralph Bronner

"Hobo's Lullaby"  
Written By Reeves Goebel  
Published By Sanga Music Inc

Original Composition for the Piano  
Written and performed by Keith Waa

"Mobile Wash Unit"  
Written by Don Ralph  
Published by Stingy Brim Music (ASCAP)  
Performed by Life In A Blender  
From album "Tell Me I'm Pretty"  
Courtesy of Fang Records

Excerpts from "Rainbow Bridge"  
Courtesy of Warner Strategic Marketing  
Inc./RHINO HOME VIDEO

Archival Photographs courtesy of :  
The Bronner Family

Additional Archival Photographs Courtesy of:  
Elgin Mental Health Center  
Zeller Mental Health Center  
Alton Mental Health Center  
Chester Mental Health Center  
And  
Joseph J. Mehr, Phd.

Very Special Thanks to:  
The Bronner Family  
And the employees of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps

**ALL-ONE!**

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# The New York Times

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NEW YORK, FRIDAY, JUNE 29, 2007

## WEEKEND Arts MOVIES PERFORMANCES

### Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox

*Opens today in Manhattan.  
Directed by Sara Lamm  
Not rated; 88 minutes*

A documentary about the famously tingly soap with the famously batty label, "Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox" mixes method and madness to chart the evolution of a counterculture phenomenon.

A German who immigrated to the United States in 1929, Dr. Emanuel H. Bronner was a master chemist who devoted his life to making soap and teaching his "Moral ABC," espoused in the collection of quotations and rantings still printed on every bottle. A spell in a mental institution failed to distract him from his crusade, and today his socially responsible principles guide a thriving family business.

Directed by Sara Lamm with more attention to texture than focus, the movie probes beneath the bubbles to unearth its subject's troubled



Stewart Nelson

Dr. Emanuel H. Bronner, the subject of "Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox."

relationship with his Jewish heritage and his insistence on the equality of all human beings. What emerges is a complex portrait of a man who cares more for humanity than for his own children, often left to languish in orphanages while their father scoured bodies and minds.

Throughout, Dr. Bronner's hectoring voice punctures the film with a barrage of nonsense and utopian philosophy.

"Eccentric geniuses cannot be good fathers," insists his middle son, Ralph, who travels the country offering his father's story — and hugs — indiscriminately. Given that the story includes a company that has donated more than 70 percent of its profits to humanitarian and environmental causes, we should all be so eccentric. **JEANNETTE CATSOULIS**

# Los Angeles Times

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## **Dr. Bronner: Clean living? Well, colorful, at least** **Sara Lamm's documentary on the soap entrepreneur reveals an unusual man with a higher calling.**

By Kevin Crust, Times Staff Writer  
July 13, 2007

A biographical documentary always benefits from a charismatic figure at its center. "Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox" is fortunate to have two of them.

Filmmaker Sara Lamm's film ostensibly chronicles the life and career of the proselytizing natural soap-maker Dr. Emanuel H. Bronner, but it also spends a lot of time with his son, Ralph, who travels the country lecturing and spreading the words of his father.

A bizarre character of epic proportions, Bronner was born in Germany in 1908 and emigrated to the U.S. at the age of 21, a decade before the Nazis killed his parents and nationalized the family soap plant. His experiences were larger than life, but even so his version of his story often seems to border on fiction. He claimed to be the nephew of Albert Einstein, for example, and referred to the Illinois insane asylum where he was confined as a concentration camp.

Escaping from the asylum to California in the late 1940s, the doctor (a self-anointed title, though he was considered a master chemist) revived the family trade of soap-making and began turning out peppermint oil-based multipurpose cleaners. The tingly product was embraced by the counterculture, and Bronner became something of an underground hero and an early advocate of healthy living.

An impassioned speaker, Bronner was a virulent anti-Communist and railed against the fluoridation of drinking water. His activities didn't go unnoticed by the FBI, mainly because he frequently called them with complaints and suggestions.

Bronner's larger mission in life, however, was "to unite all mankind and spaceship Earth" through his "All-One" philosophy. He called for worldwide peace and preached unifying principles through a manifesto he called "The Moral ABCs" that was and continues to be printed on every label of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soap — 4.5 million bottles and counting. The teachings are based partly in Judaism but draw from most of the world's major religions.

Lamm makes liberal use of archival footage of Bronner, including countless hours of fiery, self-made audiotapes, presenting an enigmatic character whose accented, staccato speech and Yoda-like syntax were both mesmerizing and confounding. Blind for the last 20 years of his life (he passed away in 1997), he appears as a slightly wacky prophet whose at-times mystifying message belied a crafty, entrepreneurial mind.

Devoting one's life to uniting spaceship Earth had a heavy personal cost. Bronner left his three small children in various foster-care situations after his wife died, visiting them when possible, but essentially sacrificing them for the "greater good." Despite being a self-proclaimed rabbi, he also showed signs of denying his Jewish heritage and favoring his blond, blue-eyed son, Jim, over the darker Ralph.

The film makes no judgment of Bronner's treatment of his family, presenting it as tragedy as much as anything else. The revelation of the film is the warmth his family now feels toward him, seemingly understanding his fervent beliefs, forgiving his choices and growing the progressive soap company in ways the patriarch may never have imagined. Operated under what might be called benevolent capitalism, Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps is a multimillion-dollar family-run business and donates 70% of its net profits.

Its vice-president is Ralph Bronner, who looks like a stockier version of his father and shares his fondness for talking. Ralph projects a Midwestern folksiness as he crisscrosses the country improvising lectures. He punctuates most encounters by handing out bottles of soap and asking for a hug.

Lamm effectively uses interviews with family members and the soap's users to draw a well-rounded portrait of the otherwise inscrutable senior Bronner. In doing so, she observes a bittersweet story of a family and the surprising effects a crusading eccentric can have on them.

kevin.crust@latimes.com

"Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox." MPAA rating: Unrated. Running time: 1 hour, 29 minutes. Exclusively at Laemmle's Music Hall, 9036 Wilshire Blvd., Beverly Hills, (310) 274-6869. Lamm will appear at tonight's 7:20 screening.

# VARIETY®

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## Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox

(Documentary)

By RONNIE SCHEIB

Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox'

Emanuel Bronner lofts a bottle of his famous product in 'Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox.'

A Balcony Releasing release of a Reckon So presentation of a Reckon So, Ghost Robot production. Produced by Sara Lamm, Zachary Mortensen, Cheri Anderson. Executive producer, Matt Aselton. Directed by Sara Lamm.

With: Emanuel Bronner, Ralph Bronner, Jim Bronner, Trudy Bronner, Gladys Bronner, Eldridge Cleaver.

**Dr. Bronner, he of the popular organic soap with the messianic label, is something of a household word. But few could anticipate the strange saga the good doctor and his brood, encompassing the Holocaust, escape from a mental institution, counterculture idolatry, systematic child neglect, cosmic religiosity and an Off Off Broadway show. Tyro helmer Sara Lamm satisfyingly stitches together the family soap opera into a comfortable crazy quilt without sacrificing its unique, oddly topical edge. Intriguing docu, which opened June 29 at Gotham's Cinema Village before venturing further afield, should wash well with the uninitiated and faithful users alike.**

A Jew who emigrated from Germany in 1929, Emanuel Bronner continued the family craft of soap-making in America, where he traveled around preaching the "Moral ABCs" of his "All-One-God-Faith." Institutionalized and given shock treatments in an Illinois mental hospital, Bronner eventually escaped to California, where he combined his two callings by printing his teachings on every bottle of his increasingly popular, multipurpose organic peppermint soap.

Lamm cleverly repurposes those bottle labels as screen borders, with various individuals espousing their fondness for the product (a staple of every self-respecting commune in the '60s and still a favorite with those who tend to embrace an alternative lifestyle). Some read from the label's eclectic texts, which reference Hillel, Einstein and Mark Spitz in a paean to clean living and a plea to unite all inhabitants of spaceship Earth.

In its presentation of Bronner himself (who died in 1997), docu benefits from a wealth of archival materials that accumulated around the self-styled doctor as counterculture icon -- homemovies, interviews with the likes of Eldridge Cleaver, even clips from the 1971 feature "Rainbow Bridge." Bremmer's German accent, shrill delivery and incoherent rants were perhaps best appreciated by a generation that believed in nonverbal communication.

But it is through his son Ralph that Bronner's message, in its kinder, gentler form, is most effectively delivered. Though a victim of his father's almost proud neglect of his progeny (to better carry out his mission, Bronner entrusted his kids to often abusive orphanages and foster homes), Ralph travels America dispensing soap, \$50 bills and hugs. Indeed, Lamm opens her film with a scene in which Ralph, in New York to perform a folksy one-man show about his legendary dad, chats up a supremely disinterested newsstand girl and soon has her almost in tears, hugging him fiercely.

Similar acts of random kindness are captured throughout the docu, as Ralph engages a man in a cemetery who turns out to have known his father and befriends a skateboarding pianist who is caring for a dying girlfriend.

A rabid anticommunist (Lamm treats viewers to the FBI records of his numerous letters to the government, consigned to the "nut file"), Bronner preached instead a form of compassionate capitalism, which now rules the daily workings of the company, run by the children of Bronner's other son, Jim. Taking its mad-genius founder's teachings to heart, the family-owned business gives away 70% of its net profits, actively pioneers recyclable containers at all levels of production, and allows none of the Bronners' exec salaries to exceed five times what the lowest-paid employee earns.

Tech credits are creditable, Pierre de Gaillande's jaunty score setting the tone for docu's warts-and-all enjoyment of its extraordinary subjects.

# Time Out

## New York

### Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox

★★★★★

**Dir. Sara Lamm.** 2006. N/R.  
88mins. Documentary.

What eco-friendly consumer *hasn't* wondered about the man behind Magic Soap, that all-purpose cleaner famously bottled with rambling pantheological treatises? Remarkably, his tale—as told in Sara Lamm's modest yet moving doc—outweirds fiction. The film

features archival sitdowns with both the late Bronner, a soap-maker-cum-stump-preacher who fled Nazi Germany, and his progeny, who both sustain the patriarch's business and preach his Moral ABCs. Lamm smartly shades the film with accounts of Bronner's deadbeat dad—dom, providing a disturbing caveat to the good doctor's cuddly countercultural image. (Opens Fri; Cinema Village.)—*Hank Shteamer*

# Entertainment WEEKLY

## MOVIE REVIEW

### Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox (2007)

**B**

By Owen Gleiberman

You've probably never heard of Emanuel Bronner, but you may have used his soap. It's that scented liquid, often peppermint, that comes in a bottle plastered with tiny-print utopian rantings. **Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox**, a nifty curio of a movie, tells the story behind the soap: how it became an accidental hit with counterculture types; and how Bronner, a German Jewish chemist, escaped the Nazis, then an American mental institution, to spread his gospel of "All One" harmony — even as he trashed his family's life to do it. It's like *Capturing the Friedmans* scrubbed to a happy ending.



COMING CLEAN *Magic* tells the story of Bronner, for whom domestic discord was the price for spreading his message of social harmony via liquid soap

# the village VOICE

## Tracking Shots

### **Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox**

*Directed by Sara Lamm  
Opens June 29, Cinema Village*

**F**or that segment of America currently worshipping at the altar of quirkiness (high priest: Napoleon Dynamite), *Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox* is your documentary. It tells the tale of sweet, mad Dr. Emanuel Bronner, a seventh-generation German-Jewish soapmaker who, after escaping the Nazis as a young man (his father and mother would die in Buchenwald), moved to America, where he started a soap-making factory, anointed himself a "rabbi," and developed a personal philosophy based around the motto "ALL-ONE-FAITH in ONE-GOD-STATE." He was determined to "unite Spaceship Earth," even if that meant abandoning his children to orphanages while he preached the gospel on rooftops and wrote ranting letters to General Eisenhower. Eventually institutionalized in what he referred to as a concentration camp (really an insane asylum in Illinois), Bronner escaped once again and invented the "magic" product that would change his family's life: a gentle, peppermint-infused castile soap that can be used (allegedly) for anything from tooth-brushing to enema-giving. Although the segments featuring Bronner's son Ralph veer uncomfortably toward hagiography, first-time director Sara Lamm balances out the love-fest by exploring the dark side of being a soap-hawking prophet and the toll that ALL-ONE-FAITH took on Bronner's family. **JULIA WALLACE**

## NOT SO SIMPLE SUDS

A nutcase with a messianic wish to cleanse

by Marsha McCreadie

*Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox*  
Directed by Sara Lamm

LIKE THE COUNTER-CULTURE it talks about, the documentary, *Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox*, is fun, well-meaning, often smart and sometimes off-balance. If you missed the whole thing first time around—the 1960s—here's a chance to catch up. For others it's a nostalgic hoot, even if they never used the all-purpose, "all-one" soap.

This first-time direction by Sara Lamm, a Downtown performance artist, uses archival footage, home movies of the real life Dr. Emanuel Bronner who died in 1997 and interviews with family members. Eldridge Cleaver turns up. Hippies of the time thread through, enthusing about Bronner and the liquid which cleansed everything from teeth to the colon—and all spots in between and around.

Escaping from an insane asylum in Illinois in 1947, which he later mythologized into a Nazi concentration camp, Bronner hitched to L.A. and created his admixture in vats, from an old family formula. (Always claiming to be Albert Einstein's nephew, Bronner ranted so much, even the FBI stopped listening, filing him under nutcase.)

Today's successful business is run by Bronner's grandsons, apples who fell close to the tree. They proudly display their earth-friendly plant, claim to have pioneered the recyclable bottle and cap their own salaries. The movie approves. The soap? Same as ever: Castile, peppermint, an occasional sweat droplet.

Dr. B was no proper patriarch though, rarely visiting his kids dumped in orphanages and foster homes, preferring podiums across the country. The least-favored child, Ralph, defends his father with his own traveling slide show today. "Dad always used to say, 'What's more important? Uniting spaceship earth or raising your own family?'" Good question, when today's family values usually mean grab for you and yours exclusively.

We see too much of nice-guy Ralph and not enough of the messianic Emanuel. What really made him tick? Maybe there wasn't enough footage of him for this 88-minute doc to find out. Still, you won't want to miss the cartoon of the hippie couple in the shower blissfully sudsing.

JUNE 27–JULY 3, 2007 ■ NEW YORK PRESS

# LOS ANGELES' ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINE

# venice

**T**he bottle for Dr. Bronner's Magic Soap looks like it could contain the secrets to the universe, and perhaps it does. Some of them at least. The "#1-selling certified organic soap in the world," it comes in a cylindrical container with a label crammed with the philosophical teachings of the late Dr. Emanuel Bronner, which he collectively called "The Moral ABC's" and punctuated with catch-phrases such as "All-One-God-Faith," which pushed for peaceful co-existence in all areas. An escapee of Nazi Germany whose family had been in the soap business for several generations, Bronner founded his company with the intention of both keeping the world clean and uniting it via the philosophies on his bottle. Peace and hygiene, one bottle of soap at a time. Filmmaker Sara Lamm, who has created a history of Dr. Bronner and his descendants with her documentary, *Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox*, had been using the famed soap for a while when she decided to make it the focus of a comedic multi-media performance art piece a number of years ago. Recalls Lamm, "I had always been intrigued by the text on the label of the soap. We interpreted the label in the performance piece." Prior to the performance, Lamm had written to Ralph Bronner, the 70-year-old son of Dr. Bronner, and received a complimentary box

of soap for her cast and crew. This was the beginning of a relationship which would eventually blossom into the documentary. After 9-11, Ralph Bronner sent Lamm another free box of soap, asking her to distribute it to the rescue workers and neighbors of Ground Zero. And then when Ralph himself staged and starred in his own show in Manhattan, based around his father, Lamm made the decision to start filming what would become *Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox*.

Lamm explains that there were two significant sets of surprises she unearthed while doing her research on the Bronners. The first was the level of commitment to green policies that Dr. Bronner's descendants have maintained and expanded from the good doctor's original vision. The Escondido, CA-based company sells some six million bottles of soap per year, and donates 70% of its net profits to environmental and social projects. And then there was the personal history of Dr. Bronner and his family. Says Lamm, "It's a complicated family legacy. And the more time I spent on the film, the more complicated it became." When preaching about his mission "to unite mankind and spaceship Earth," Dr. Bronner's passions often took over, to the point of ranting. In the late '40s, he was institutionalized in an insane asylum after a public

rant, but he escaped in 1948, hitchhiking to California where he invented what would become his Magic Soap. The product became a success, particularly after being embraced by the counterculture of the '60s. But while a success on so many other levels, Dr. Bronner was never even close to being a model dad. His son Ralph recalls being put into a series of foster homes and orphanages as his father toured the country constantly, spreading the Magic Soap message. But, despite that, Ralph is himself the public face of the company today, disseminating both Magic Soap and his father's philosophies wherever he can. And he seems to be his father's biggest fan. It's a warts and all portrayal of the Bronners in the film, but there's no question that the overall impression painted is a good one. When asked how the family reacted to the finished film, Lamm says, "There's been a range of emotions, but it's been largely positive. It's difficult to watch the legacy of your father or grandfather defined by an 88-minute film. I am enormously grateful to them for their trust in me." ▼

*Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox* washes onto the Sundance Channel on July 3rd and also opens theatrically in Los Angeles on July 13th.

