

TV / MUSIC / ENTERTAINMENT

ROMEO VOID TELEVISION PIECE • CLIENT: VH1 / MTV

Rising up from the edgy punk-pop movement, Romeo Void grabbed the attention of the burgeoning California punk scene in 1982 with their sexually charged club hit, “Never Say Never.” Their release from the year before, the jazz and funk infused, “It’s a Condition,” garnered critical acclaim and piqued the interest of The Cars frontman Ric Ocasek. Ocasek approached the band in 1982 and offered to produce the hit, “Never Say Never.” Frontwoman Debora Iyall’s evocative lyric, “I might like you better if we slept together,” quickly launched the band to underground stardom status and put them into heavy rotation at dance clubs across America.

A product of the art school environment, Romeo Void was born at the San Francisco Art Institute in the late 70s where Iyall met bassist Frank Zincavage. The addition of Peter Woods on guitar, saxophonist Benjamin Bossi, and eventually Aaron Smith on drums rounded out the band and created the jazzy rhythmic drone that worked well with Iyall’s sultry, intelligent lyrics.

Fueled by the success of their 1981 release, “Talk Dirty,” which rose to number 31 on Billboard’s Club Play chart, the band went on to record the LP, “Benefactor,” the following year. Their popular post-punk stature was due in part to the music but also to the fact that Iyall’s Native American roots and atypical frontwoman body image cut to the core of the anti-conformity punk message. Iyall, often performing in a nurse’s dress and other shock-wear, flew a flag in the face of societal norms and carved away at tired old establishment views of the female archetype.

The band saw success again in 1984 with the release of what is largely considered to be their seminal album, “Instincts,” which produced another hit, “A Girl in Trouble.” Rising to number 35 on the Billboard Singles chart and winning them an appearance on American Bandstand, “A Girl in Trouble” was to be their highest charting, and final hit.

At the height of their success in 1985, Romeo Void embarked on an American tour that coincided with the band’s move from San Francisco’s 415 Records to the corporate giant Columbia. Now full swing into the MTV age, corporate record labels were becoming increasingly image conscious. Iyall’s atypical body image didn’t fit their mold, and the label pulled support for the album halfway through their American tour. Video had indeed killed the radio star.