

Disturbing the peace



415 RECORDS

P.O. Box 14563
San Francisco, Ca. 94114
(415) 621-3415/(415) 621-3416

Photo: George Rose



Howie Klein (left foreground), Chris Knab

Howie Klein and Chris Knab were intimately involved in the music scene; Howie was a writer/dj; Chris as the owner of Aquarius Records and a dj. In 1978, they formed 415 Records with \$400 and put out a single by the Nuns, "Suicide Child". They continued to release singles by local New Wave bands, handling distribution directly from Chris' apartment. The promotions/publicity department was housed at Howie's. The name 415 Records was inspired by a song called "415 Music" by the Readymades and eventually released on a compilation album. The number 415 has multiple meanings: It is the police code for disturbing the peace, the local telephone area code, and it refers to the basic chord structure common in much 'new wave' music.

At the outset all monies were put back into the label. Howie and Chris (and Butch Bridges, their silent partner) were able to produce records on paltry sums, making some profit possible. They escalated 415's output and released three LPs: a compilation album, called 415 Music; SVT's LP and the Units' Digital Stimulation. By mid-1980, Butch had left and Queenie Taylor was the third side of the 415 triangle. She was booking bands for Bill Graham Productions, and still does. In addition, she manages the Old Waldorf and the Kabuki Theater for BGP. 415 continued to develop new groups, producing discs with New Math from Rochester, New York and Roky Erikson, former leader of Texas' legendary 13th Floor Elevators. With the signing of Romeo Void, 415's real potential was beginning to rear its optimistic head. It's A Condition and the EP containing "Never Say Never" established a strong audience and sold in the area of 70,000 copies. With the success of the Never Say Never EP, 415 celebrated by getting an office!

Because the market for New Wave music was broadening and, further, because 415's demonstrated ability to produce marketable products for insignificant sums (albums recorded for \$3,000 to \$5,000), major record companies began approaching the label. Howie, Chris and Queenie settled on Columbia Records because they were interested in more than Romeo Void. And "because, of course, Columbia is the best label", Howie says with a smile. The 415/Columbia pact took place in May, 1982. Shortly afterwards, Translator's Heartbeats and Triggers was the first LP released on the hybrid label. Quickly following was Romeo Void's Benefactor.

Another important event in 415's history was the release of the Red Rockers LP, Good As Gold. The single, "China", is presently bulleted in Billboard. This is the first 415 product to make the "Hot 100" and is expected to make the Top 40 shortly. 415 is hoping this success will be duplicated by Translator's second LP, No Time Like Now, to be released the first week in August. They are also looking forward to the release of their newest group, The Renegades, with their first LP slated for October. Romeo Void will also be in the studio in early August, with an album scheduled for release early next year. When asked about plans for the future, Howie Klein notes that they expect to work primarily on the acts now signed to the label. As much as they are constantly watching and helping new acts, Klein notes that it has thus far been 415's policy to work with groups at least a year before signing them to the label. As a footnote, he does note however, that there are at least two groups he is working with now that they expect to sign sometime in the future.

Howie makes a point of emphasizing that he is really not in it for the money, but rather for the music. Although many labels claim to have a "family" environment, the attitude seems to hold a little more truth at 415 where the acts all root for each other, play on each other's gigs and albums, and even go so far as to put up posters for each other as they travel. Klein smiles as he says, "It's really satisfying to be part of that feeling".