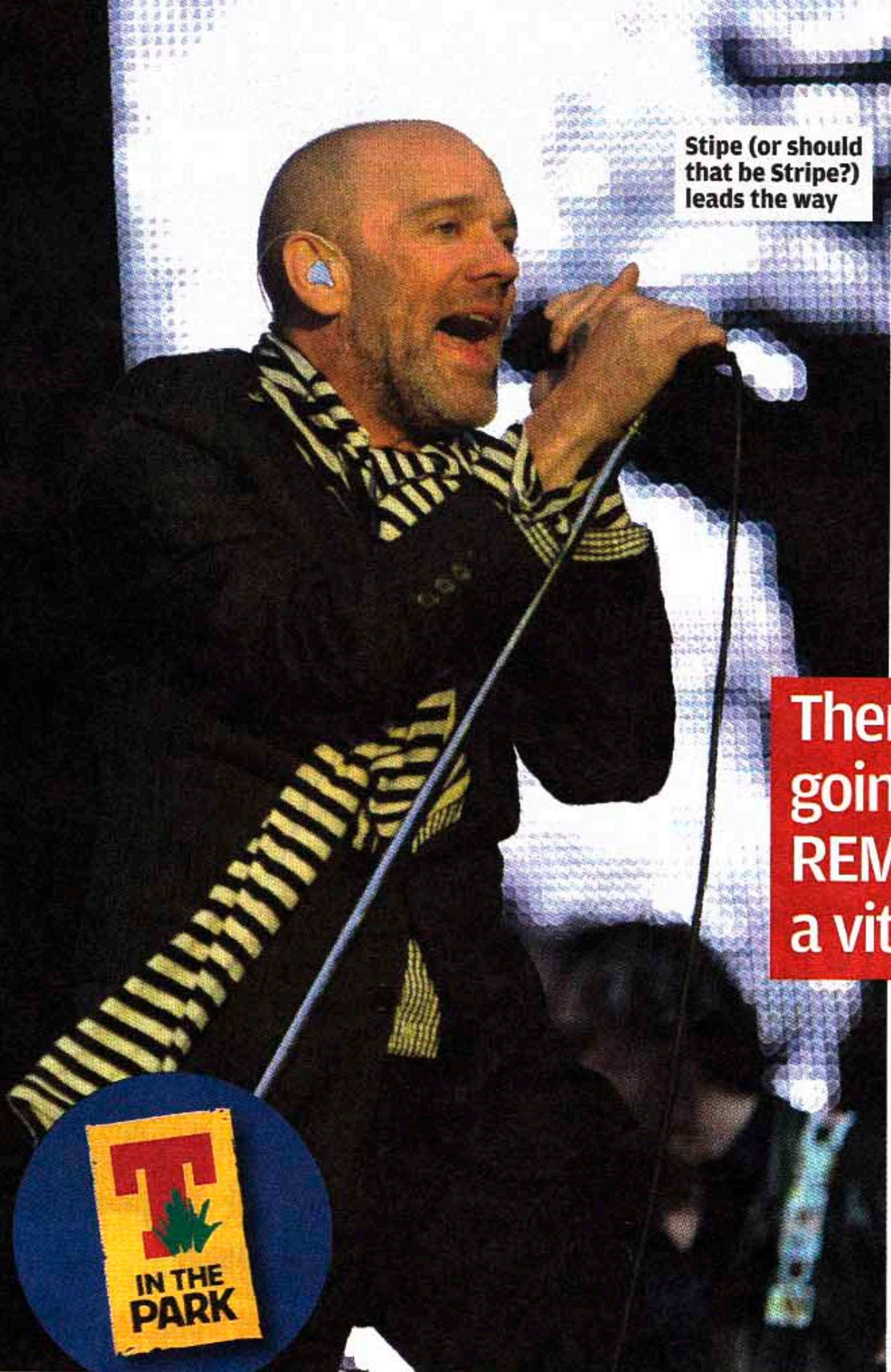


THE BEST BANDS
AT **T** IN THE PARK & **Oxegen '08**



Stipe (or should that be Stripe?) leads the way

AMERICAN HEROES

REM



There's something going on that's exciting REM, making them a vital force again

Main Stage, Sunday, 13/07/08

So, after two days in which two reformed acts have received returning heroes' welcomes headlining the Main Stage, what of the band that chose not to give up? After the departure of drummer and co-songwriter Bill Berry in 1997, REM's mystique gradually faded. Sure, they were still big box-office, as witnessed by their greatest hits set here in 2003, but generally thought to be trading on past

glories. Well, it just might be that there's something going on that's exciting REM again, making them feel a vital and potent force once more. And coming just the night after Rage Against The Machine predictably speak out against the outgoing US President, REM choose to make their own protest, albeit in a much more subtle way. Their set is littered with songs offering stiff commentaries on American

indiscretions, whether it be about Vietnam (a ferocious 'Orange Crush') or the effects of Reaganomics ('Bad Day'). Most uplifting of all though, is their excavating of 'Ignoreland', the rarely-played political rant from 1992's 'Automatic For The People'. A raucous, Stooges-like take on the current US President's dad's time in the White House, it's a song which now takes on a new significance due to the current urge

for change, and the very real prospect of an Obama triumph. But there's no hectoring, because Stipe really doesn't feel the need. Speaking to *NME* before the show, he tells us why, saying: "On the US leg of the tour [earlier in the summer], I really felt the need between songs to have some kind of running commentary about the more political songs and how they resonate. I don't really feel the need to do that in Europe." Which is fair enough - everyone here seems to get it. And let's not forget, at heart REM are good old-fashioned entertainers, not prone to taking themselves too seriously. When

bassist Mike Mills takes centre stage to sing lead vocals on the band's 1984 country-flavoured classic '(Don't Go Back To) Rockville', he dons a Stetson, while Stipe himself puts on a couple of comedy hats donated by fans at the front, and later conducts the singalong of the night to 'Losing My Religion' right on the cusp of the crowd. Meanwhile, the impressive video screens behind the band project the scene back from the stage, while bathing the whole thing in stunning red neon. It's an awesome sight, and one with an emotional core at its heart that's hard to replicate - and Scotland is loving them for it. Whether it's the furious-paced, fresh-sounding newies from best album in yonks 'Accelerate' or golden oldies such as communal anthem and set closer 'Man On The Moon', everyone here is just enjoying the perfect end to a fantastic weekend. So whether they ever technically went away or not, one thing's blatantly obvious now: REM are back. **Alan Woodhouse**