



It's the dawn of a shiny new millennium and you're one of the biggest and most respected rock acts ever. You've just inked a new deal with your record company for a cool \$80 million, tours are selling out in milliseconds and the Grammy awards are coming in threes. For R.E.M., those doughty godfathers of intellectual indie from Athens, Georgia, it must have seemed that the 21st century was their private playground. But things didn't quite work out that way.

For starters, barely a year later, stalwart drummer Bill Berry announced his departure – partly due to a brain aneurysm suffered on tour – leaving the band feeling like a 'three-legged dog' (their words). They'd also just lost a manager,

following allegations of sexual harassment, and had come precariously close to breaking up during fractious recording sessions for their next album *Up*.

The ensuing decade has been less than happy, with *Up* being (unfairly) panned as a failure and the last two albums *Reveal* (2001) and *Around The Sun* (2004) being similarly dismissed as deeply flawed; this time with more justification. When the band met up in Vancouver last year to start work on their new album, there was a strong whiff of urgency in the air.

First, positive signs came at the live rehearsals for the album in Dublin, where the trio rekindled some of the kinetic attack absent on recent recordings. After teaming up with maverick producer Garret 'Jackknife' Lee in the studio, >>>

LIFE'S RICH

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER THEIR DEBUT ALBUM, R.E.M. HAVE COME FULL CIRCLE WITH NEW LP ACCELERATE. MICHAEL STIPE AND PETER BUCK TALK LIFE, LYRICS AND LAUNDRY WITH MARK GIFFORD