



R.E.M.

Collapse Into Now

Warner Brothers

By [Al Kaufman](#)

If R.E.M. came out with *Collapse Into Now* on the heels of 1994's *Monster*, it would have been their biggest seller. It's got all the power and passion that has been missing from the boys from Athens since Bill Berry left the band.

But, alas, *Collapse* comes out in 2011. R.E.M., already safely enshrined in the Hall of Fame, are considered things of the past. That's too bad, because with 2008's *Accelerate*, plus their sadly overlooked live CD in 2009, this is by far their best stuff in the post-Berry era.

*I think I'll sing and rhyme
I'll give it one more time
I'll show the kids how to do it
Fine, fine, fine*

So spits out Michael Stipe on "All the Best," the most raucous song R.E.M. has done in years. R.E.M. feel like they have something to prove here. They want to be in the conversation with the U2s and Radioheads (a band that really took off after they opened for R.E.M. on their *Monster* tour). And while there is a sense of urgency in this album, Stipe is able to retain some humor. "It's just like me to overstay my welcome, man," he jibes on the same song.

Humor. Remember when Stipe had that before he became angry, dreary, and mopey? Before he went from a mumblor with indecipherable lyrics to someone who preached at us with all the subtlety of a Lady Gaga outfit? Well, he doesn't mumble here, but he ain't no preacher either. Who knows what "Alligator_Aviator_Autopilot_Antimatter" is about, but when Stipe gets in a shouting match with the queen of erotic electronica, [Peaches](#), it's an all out blast. As is "[Mine Smell Like Honey](#)," a catchy pop-rock nugget about a guy obviously having trouble recognizing his own faults. Stipe is even downright sunny on "Every Day Is Yours to Win" and the energetic love song, "That Someone Is You," and that feeling becomes contagious.

R.E.M. encompasses it all here. Peter Buck brings out the mandolin. There are some beautiful harmonies. There are even a couple of the mid-tempo ballads that they cranked out *ad-nauseum*

in the early 2000s, but here, amongst all the energy, they are a welcome change of tempo. Stipe even plays the wounded man on [“Oh My Heart.”](#) but does so without appearing maudlin.

The one thing that may be missing from *Collapse* is creativity. Everything sounds at least a bit like something we have heard before from R.E.M., the sole exception being the closer, “Blue.” In it, Stipe talks and rants incoherently while his idol, [Patti Smith](#), eerily moans in the background. While this does not sound like anything R.E.M. has done before, it sure sounds like a Patti song. This is *Easter*-era Patti, and there ain’t nothing wrong with that at all.

R.E.M. is back, and for those who still care to listen, it will be time to party like it’s 1995.