

Rock

Park Zoo. Bassist Flea in particular looked like he had just escaped the chimp house, as he hunched over his instrument while bouncing up and down on his toes.

For 90 minutes, the Peppers kept up the frenzy. There was Flea doing a shoulder roll and a flying split, while Kiedis did a hand stand and whipped his shoulder-length hair with such abandon that he began to give off steam.

At times, the Peppers verged on a parody of the funk and rap bands they hope to emulate (a poor man's Parliament-Funkadelic?), but their vastly improved musicianship kept matters from getting farcical, and their stomping, take-no-prisoners attack occasionally loosened a few molars.

Covers of Lou Reed's "Sweet Jane," Jimi Hendrix's "Crosstown Traffic" and Stevie Wonder's "Higher Ground," plus an irreverent snippet of the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the U.K." sung by Flea in falsetto, showed off the band's range. Kiedis even let down his Me Tarzan-You Jane persona to sing the ballad "I Could Have Lied."

Chad Smith's carpet-bomb drumming set the tempo, while Flea alternately banged his bass like a percussion instrument or deepened the groove with unexpectedly plangent melodic lines.

On "Give It Away," John Fruschiante uncoiled a recurring guitar riff while Flea played a variation on the Beatles' "I Am the Walrus" and Smith paid ham-fisted homage to Led Zeppelin's John Bonham. Kiedis made the word "give" ripple off his tongue as though he were driving over a series of speed bumps at 90 miles an hour.

It was a masterful bit of sustained tension, an indication that the Peppers have started to dig beyond the artifice of their funk funhouse.

Opening the show were the Seattle band Pearl Jam and Chicago's Smashing Pumpkins.

Pearl Jam played psychedelic variations on '70s hard rock, anchored by Jeff Ament's thunderous bass, but without any particular distinction. Singer Eddie Vedder, however, was a compelling presence, whether singing in his deep, soulful baritone or stretching across the moat in front of the stage to touch fingers with a member of the audience.

Vedder concluded the set with a dive into the crowd, and traveled smoothly on a sea of helpful hands and arms halfway across the dancefloor, before being returned triumphantly to the stage.

The transforming power of Smashing Pumpkins, so evident in smaller halls earlier this year, didn't show up. Singer-guitarist Billy Corgan is a charismatic presence, but the band's mix of power and sensuality was all but buried by the Aragon's horrendous acoustics.