

Explosive Performance By Red Hot Chili Peppers

By David Surkamp

SLAM-DANCING your style? Does being tossed over the heads of the crowd (without even being a rock star) while funk-laden bass grooves churn the air sound like the makings of a perfect evening?

Well, the triple bill of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Smashing Pumpkins and Pearl Jam could have been your ticket to happiness. The three bands landed at the American Theatre on Monday evening for the first performance of a two-night stand.

The Red Hot Chili Peppers have come a long way since I saw them at Mississippi Nights a few years ago. In the meantime, the quartet has gained commercial momentum, and scores of other acts have scrambled to follow in its footsteps.

On Monday, singer Anthony Kiedis was a delight to watch as he worked the crowd, while bassist Flea proved that he continues to lay down some of the heaviest bass grooves in the business. The performance was musically explosive and physically demanding for both the band and the audience.

"Stone Cold Bush," "Funky Crime" and "Subway to Venus" captured the essence of the Chili Peppers' style, with John Frusciante's slashing guitar slicing through the din. The guitarist's rhythm style reminds me of the sound that breaking glass makes as shards hit the pavement, while his free-form solos owe a hat tip to both Jimi Hendrix and Captain Beefheart.

Still, Flea is the instrumentalist of note in the Peppers. Although he displays ample humor between songs, the minute he launches into his bass it becomes deadly serious. His introduction to Stevie Wonder's "Higher Ground" bordered on the spiritual in

its power, accuracy and drive.

The Smashing Pumpkins seemed way out of its league on this bill. The band's noise for noise's sake was pretty insipid between the high standards it was sandwiched between. The Pumpkins' few attempts at musical drama wore thin quickly, while listening to the guitarists' inane and soulless feedback frenzy was just plain boring.

The Seattle-based Pearl Jam was the unexpected highlight of the program, coming across with terrific sound, songs and attitude.

The group boasts the presence of guitarist Stone Gossard and bassist Jeff Ament from the legendary Northwest acts, Green River and Mother Love Bone.

Songs such as "Alive" and "Deep" were just fine, but singer Eddie Vedders stole the show when he climbed monkey-like the length and breadth of the mezzanine balcony during "Porch." It was a performance that should be the talk of the town for weeks to come.