

Pearl Jam outstrips the Seattle slew

By **JIM FARBER**

Daily News Staff Writer

PEARL JAM STEPPED OUT OF Nirvana's shadow at their Sunday show at Limelight. Since the band's success came hot on the heels of Nirvana's triple-platinum breakthrough, and since both groups arise from the same flannel-shirt-wearing Seattle scene, Pearl Jam's rise has been ungenerously viewed as a classic case of coattail riding.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

REVIEW

While Nirvana's miraculous ascent no doubt helped airlift other guitar-based Seattle groups (Soundgarden included), Pearl Jam's Limelight show re-proved the group's individuality with pounding assurance.

The five-man band edges closer to earnest, psychedelic blues than Nirvana's surly punk, especially in the rickety, fuzz-toned leads of Mike McCready. Based around dense, burly guitar chords, the group's weighty, mid-paced music provides a wide berth for Eddie Vedder's chant-like vocals.

Onstage, Vedder is the clear focus, in part due to his sheer physical aggression. In his most daring move, Vedder crawled around the Limelight's meager balcony and took a death-defying dive, some 15 feet

down, into the audience (packed dense enough to withstand the impact).

Vedder's voice can be equally dramatic. In an intriguing balance, he leans into verses with growling anger, then soars in the choruses with redemptive abandon. It's a schism likewise reflected in Vedder's lyrics, which outline harsh tales of abandonment with convincing empathy. The best of these provided the evening's highlights — especially "Jeremy," "Why Go," and the hit "Alive," all of which center on neglected children.

PEARL JAM BURIED THE HIT in the middle of the set, an appropriate move considering the rest of their material is no less strong. Then again, since the group has but one full album out ("Ten"), they faced a shortage of songs to fill the 75-minute set. To flesh things out, the group offered several inspired covers, including a grungy take on The Beatles' "I Got a Feeling," and a reverently gnarled version of Neil Young's "Rockin' in the Free World."

Like all good covers, the ones here helped Pearl Jam reveal more of themselves. Enough so that when the band left the stage and the deejay immediately slapped on Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit," it seemed no threat to Pearl Jam's identity at all.



NO COATTAILS: Pearl Jam members, from left: Stone Gossard, Dave Abbruzzese, Jeff Ament, Eddie Vedder and Mike McCready.