

Pearl jams with a sellout crowd

By PHILIP BOOTH
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ST. PETERSBURG — Just how much does Seattle's version of post-punk music owe to the conventions of '70s hard rock?

Ask Pearl Jam, whose appealing brand of the trendy grunge 'n' roll sound has been creating a stir, from the small screen — a hyped "Saturday Night Live" appearance — to such sold-out venues as Jannus Landing.

The difference: Singer Eddie Vedder and his four hair-heavy bandmates match those familiar, heavy, crashing, often minor-toned guitar chords with choppy rhythms, passages that are deliberately slow and entrancing and a distinctively progressive consciousness, one that touches on racism and environmental concerns.

MUSIC REVIEW Vedder, near the end of Wednesday night's show, told of his previous trip to Florida, when he went to the beach looking for enlightened surfer types, but found "redneck racists" instead.

"Even you can make a change in your life," he added later.

Vedder, guitarists Mike McCready and Stone Gossard, bassist Jeff Ament and drummer Dave Krusen, who formed Pearl Jam on the ashes of Green River and Mother Love Bone, proved masters of pacing during the 70-minute concert.

The show mostly focused on material taken from "Ten," the band's well-received 1991 major-label debut album.

The hypnotic, entrancing "Oceans," bolstered by Ament's fretless-bass surges, was countered by the psychedelia, wah-wah jamming and tunefulness of the new single "Even Flow" and the thrash-happy thrust of "Why Go."



Security officials restrain a fan from being thrown upon stage, while Eddie Vedder, lead

singer of the alternative rock band Pearl Jam, sings to a sold-out crowd at Jannus Landing.

Tribune photograph by JOHN STANMEYER

"Alive," the chugging, impossibly catchy pop tune partly responsible for giving the band its break-out potential, arrived about midway through the show and signaled a sudden burst of crowd energy.

The band took the occasion to stretch out, sticking some inventive stops and guitar breaks into the middle of the song.

Pearl Jam's musical muscle and emotional outpouring were allied with a stage performance that was all about physicality and constant motion.

Vedder, like his bandmates a blur of herky-jerky movement, at one point scaled a support pole, slid back down and allowed his sweaty flesh-and-bones body to be passed over the hands of the audience.

Neil Young, a '60s survivor who has turned into one of the guitar and songwriting heroes of modern alternative rock bands, was toasted with a show-ending cover of "Rocking in the Free World."

It was grittier and nastier and grungier than even King Neil probably intended.

But the spirit, intent and raw guitar power, none of which can be faked, were there. The song's author would have approved.

Follow For Now, from Atlanta, opened the show with a bristling set of soulful rock, funk and punk in the tradition of Living Colour and Bad Brains.

The all-white Pearl Jam audience clearly connected with the black band.

Philip Booth is the Tribune's pop music critic.