

NEIL YOUNG, PEARL JAM

**Finsbury Park, London
Sunday, July 11**

NEIL YOUNG



PEARL JAM



IT MUST be a sobering thought for any band, knowing that Neil Young is going to take the stage after you and render everything you've said and done that day instantly forgettable. This is no slur on Pearl Jam. It's just the way it is.

Still, there's always that Vedder voice to remind us that Pearl Jam are at least half equal to the hype. It must be tough in the one album/instant fame/endless world tour club, and Pearl Jam are probably as bored of playing the songs from 'Ten' as we are of hearing them. Vedder dedicated 'Even Flow' to any women awaiting late periods, threw carrots into the crowd and had what looked like 'Fuck It All' written on the back of his jacket. The man is possibly a little stir-crazy. Whatever, 'Once' is still great, the new songs – 'Blood', 'Glorified G' – sounded darker and heavier, but otherwise Pearl Jam seemed all played-out.

When Neil Young sent the opening chords of 'Mr Soul' ringing out over the park, he was greeted by an ecstatic roar of welcome. A similar noise erupted a few songs later, as Young transformed his trademark mean 'n' dirty feedback into the opening notes of 'Like A Hurricane'. Which, coming directly after a flawless 'Helpless', sent the dewy-eyed faithful nuts.

The backing band, Booker T And The MGs, were *incredible*. There's no substitute for experience and pure class; 'Love To Burn' was simply awesome, Donald 'Duck' Dunn's bedrock bass pumping away beneath Young's alternately gentle and raging guitar lines. The incendiary power of Young's guitar has to be heard live to be believed – our generation's

crop of slacker Grunge upstarts must surely look on and shake their heads in wonder.

'Harvest Moon' and 'Only Love Can Break Your Heart' were grace and beauty incarnate (ever stood in a *completely silent* festival-size crowd?), and a soaring 'Powderfinger' sent shivers down thousands of spines. 'The Needle



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And 'The Damage Done' was as poignant as ever, after which Young and band crunched into what I think was 'When You Dance I Can Really Love' at about twice the previous volume. For encores we got 'Rockin' In The Free World' – simply the best protest song to come out of the States during the Bush years – and a thumping version of Dylan's 'All Along The Watchtower'. Only Young could transform the latter from just another good-time cover into a darkly ominous warning, rendering it as apt for this decade as any other.

This was rock 'n' roll as it appears in our dreams; liberating, life-affirming, unchained. Tonight, Neil Young was the coolest guy to ever walk across a stage. Total fucking godhead.

NEIL PERRY