

# PEARL JAM, TRIBE AFTER TRIBE

*Brixton Academy, London*

*Tuesday, July 13*

## PEARL JAM



## TRIBE AFTER TRIBE



IT'S A bad mistake. Tribe After Tribe amble onstage and casually break into 'Pentangle', a sprawling, freeform workout which probably lasts about 10 minutes but seems to go on for days. It's not a number guaranteed to set any gig on fire.

Their current album 'Love Under Will' marries traditional South African tribal rhythms with Robbi Robb's crunching lead work to some good effect, but live, the band seem dwarfed by the size of the venue, and rhythm section and guitarist don't quite gel. 'Nikita' sounds strong, but then here comes another one of those overly lengthy, trippy workouts...

Tribe After Tribe are probably much better suited to a small, sweaty club than the cavernous Academy. Tonight, they needed to shorten the set by 20 minutes and loosen their shoulders.

Pearl Jam look like a completely different band from the bedraggled five-piece of two days before at Finsbury Park. There, they were uncomfortable, slack, self-conscious. Here, they look relaxed and perfectly at home. But it's obvious that Eddie Vedder is a troubled man: we aren't allowed to photograph tonight, and he's looking brittle and, well, a little chubbier around the chops. The spectre of his unwanted elevation to being an icon of horribly Bono-esque proportions clearly sits uneasily on his shoulders. There are a few demons to be exorcised in front of this frenziedly loyal capacity crowd – and he does it, growing in confidence with every song. By the time the set ends with 'Indifference', his hypnotic, soaring voice sounds simply superb.

There's no messing about, no ceremony. They pound straight in to 'Why Go' and the sinuous 'Deep', bassist Jeff Ament bouncing on lengths of invisible elastic, guitarist Mike McCready effortlessly peeling off riff after glorious riff. It's the diminutive McCready who really carries the majority of Pearl Jam's melodies – he absolutely shines on 'Jeremy' and new track 'Animal' – but the whole focus is always going to be directed towards Vedder, however much he hates it.

This year, there's no joking, no crowd-surfing: all Eddie's frustration and energy, even bitterness and paranoia, is vented through the lyrics of the new songs, of which they play at least nine, along with virtually the whole of 'Ten'. 'Blood', a surge of pure aggression, and the brilliant 'Whipping', which sees Vedder attacking a guitar along with Messrs McCready and Gossard, stand out, but all the forthcoming new album's more raw, frenetic material slots in easily with the rest of the familiar stuff, and the audience reaction is so ecstatic you can't tell that most are hearing it for the first time ever.

The 'Ten' tracks are met with near hysteria, and Pearl Jam thrive on it. There are superb renditions of 'Black', an immense 'Alive', a frantic, tortured 'Porch', the often overlooked gem 'Once', plus a storming cover of the Dead Boys' 'Sonic Reducer'... you get the picture.

On the strength of tonight's performance, it's obvious that Pearl Jam are poised to become the biggest selling Rock band of this decade. But when Eddie Vedder pronounces mid-set that "last year's been like a bad dream...", then finally exits with a Jesus Christ pose, you just have to hope that they'll be able to carry that burden without breaking.

**CLARE DOWSE**