

Melodic grunge of Jam thrills hot, sticky crowd

Vedder's commanding vocals set this group apart

REVIEW

Pearl Jam

Where: Edmonton Convention Centre

When: Thursday night

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First, Pearl Jam jammed the Convention Centre to capacity. Then the Seattle hard rockers turned the amplifiers up to Ten and just jammed.

The second-most famous band to emerge from Seattle's grunge rock scene — after Nirvana — Pearl Jam finally got to Edmonton Thursday.

It wasn't a minute too soon for 4,100 young rock fans who attended.

Pearl Jam had taken its time getting to the city. Its major-label debut album, *Ten*, has nearly run its course after selling more than 300,000 copies in Canada and more than four million in the United States. A new album is due in the fall.

The hall was hot and sticky and the crowd seemed custom-designed for the band. Everyone looked under 23 and into grunge as music and fashion. There were more band shirts, plaid shorts and Doc Martens boots than you could count.

A mosh pit — a mass of slamming bodies — formed near the security barriers at the front and some people were body-surfing on the outstretched hands of others even before the opening act went on.

Pearl Jam opened with the slow-burning *Release* and carefully cranked up the pace and the tension before reaching a high water mark with the fierce intensity of *Even Flow*.

The crowd was into it in a big way: you felt an outcast like the bullied anti-hero in *Jeremy* if you didn't know the words to Pearl Jam's biggest songs.

"Jeremy spoke in class today," everyone chanted in unison with lead singer Eddie Vedder as he sang the tale of the troubled, neglected kid who transforms himself at school into "King Jeremy the wicked."

Vedder — who was welcomed before he got to the stage with chants of "Eddie! Eddie!" — was the same charismatic performer we've all seen in videos and live television appearances.

Squeezing out emotion with his hands and every facial muscle, Vedder sang with a remarkable passion. Despite hypnotic melodies and the overpowering aural density of Pearl Jam's guitars, it's Vedder's strong, commanding vocals — he also writes the twisted lyrics — which will always set the group apart from the crowd.



John Lucas/The Journal

Singer Eddie Vedder is the radical element in the grunge rock combo Pearl Jam

That's not to say, however, that Pearl Jam's guitars are ho-hum. Lead guitarist Mike McCreeedy was a tensed-up ball of energy Thursday, rivaling Vedder in stage presence. He wailed away on his instrument while doing wind sprints back and forth across the stage.

On *Even Flow*, the high point of the concert's first 40 minutes, McCreeedy played a blistering, ear-piercing solo that saw him strumming so fast his right arm became a fleshy blur.

As McCreeedy staggered backwards after bringing his solo to an

abrupt stop, rhythm guitarist Stone Gossard stepped into the breach to wrap things up with another solo of a completely different flavor.

Opening act Cadillac Tramps relied on novelty but played some appealing funky rhythms underneath thrashing guitars.