

Neil triumphs over venue

And those who stayed away lost out

By Tom Harrison
Province Music Critic

"Well, it looks like this place sucks," Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder summarized his feelings about B.C. Place. "But we've been watching you and you don't, so it looks like it's between us."

With that, Pearl Jam endeavored to rescue what Neil Young will remember as one of the poorest-attended shows of his summer tour.

Not his fault, nor that of his supporting acts, Blind Melon and Pearl Jam. Between all the other Labor Day weekend events and the stigma of B.C. Place's acoustics, what should have been a sure-fire sellout became a misfire.

Having expressed its disenchantment with the cavernous football stadium to the 15,000 in attendance, Pearl Jam nonetheless made the best of its 75-minute set by interspersing favorites from the durable 10 album with new material and, during a lengthy encore, throwing in renditions of songs by two primary influences — Dead Boys and none other than Young himself.

Remarkably, the sound was better than the stay-aways expected, and Vedder as usual rose to the occasion in engaging

the moshers in front of the stage.

For his part, Neil Young didn't say much, but then, his astounding version of Keep On Rockin' in the Free World, about 30 minutes into his two-hour show, said everything for him.

It was one of those performances that cuts through everything and in its role as a universal messenger, delivers, elevates and unifies.

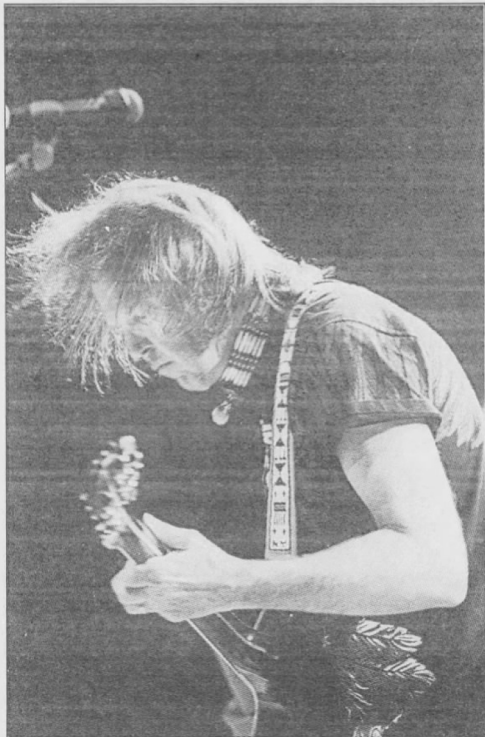
Each of Young's various bands — from Crazy Horse to the International Harvesters — has brought a different character to his songs. This is true of the venerable Booker T. and the MGs.

Once the session band on countless Stax R&B recordings, a recording act in its own right (Green Onions, Time Is Tight) and Otis Redding's touring group, the MGs aren't any old band for hire but infuse whatever they do with a classy, distinguished, muscular soulfulness.

The natural empathy they've refined likewise brought grandeur to songs such as Mr. Soul, Southern Man, Like a Hurricane, and Helpless.

Between a lengthy acoustic set, in which Young delighted the crowd with solo versions of Heart of Gold and Harvest Moon, and the electrifying segments that bookended the concert, this was more a crowd-pleasing than crowd-challenging evening, as was the recent Bob Dylan show at the PNE.

With the MGs beside him and Pearl Jam before him, Young showed again how it is possible to invigorate the familiar and place it in a contemporary framework. The guy is brilliant.



Province photo by Ric Ernst

Neil Young keeps on rockin' at B.C. Place last night.