

Pearl Jam proves it's the coolest band around

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IT'S HARD TO say exactly what made Pearl Jam's Wednesday night concert at the Catalyst so great.

Maybe it was because the whole thing was a big surprise, and no one was really sure if it wasn't all a big joke until the band took the stage.

Maybe it was the fact that this band was recently on the covers of Rolling Stone and Time magazines, and can easily fill stadiums 10 times the size of the Catalyst.

Maybe it was the crowd of people outside, begging for spare tickets, which were being scalped at more than \$100 apiece.

Or maybe Pearl Jam's just a really cool band.

For whatever reason, the show was rocking from the moment it began around 9:30 p.m. In introducing "Jeremy," the hit song that has been seen a gazillion times on MTV and various award shows, lead singer Eddie Vedder said, "We weren't gonna play this song, 'cause we've played it so much, but you haven't really seen it, till you've seen it live." He could have been talking about the band in general, and he was right.

There was something special about seeing the so-called "coolest band in the world," and being close enough to read the guitarist's T-shirt. Something about seeing this band that most people only know from TV and magazines and have them turn out to be really cool, nice guys who actually do play great music. It's not just an act done with smoke and mirrors. This band is for real.

Pearl Jam played songs from both its debut number one album, "Ten," and their recent release, "Vs." The sound was remarkably clear, and the songs actually sounded like they sound on the tape. Wow.

The audience, which was overwhelmingly young, white, and jubilant, chanted "Eddie, Eddie" and waved lighters for slow songs like "Black." There was a slam pit, but no stage diving, due to a low barrier in front of the stage.

The mood was surprisingly melodic, in contrast to the chaos outside, where heartbroken fans showed bouncers fake hand stamps and made up stories about lost relatives to get inside. The lucky few who did get to see the

music

band were downright polite, maybe due to shock that they were actually there.

Only one person tried to start a fight, but could find no takers, as the crowd opened up to give him space, and the bouncers quickly moved in and escorted him out. At one point, when the pit surged unexpectedly, someone actually shouted, "Be careful in there!"

And they were, especially when Vedder climbed to the balcony and dove into the crowd. There was an odd moment when it looked like the fans in the balcony weren't going to let go of him, but he landed safely and was passed around on top of the crowd before being returned to stage.

Vedder, who has been characterized as being somewhat moody, seemed to be in good spirits, talking with the crowd and showing off his Santa Cruz T-shirt.

Unfortunately, the growling mumble that works so well in his songs sometimes made his commentary difficult to understand. But he did make an effort to communicate with his audience, shaking hands and pointing at fans as he sang.

The entire band was in good form, playing cleanly yet with passion. While the band obviously has the energy and power to entertain stadiums, they seemed in their element in the club, energized yet focused and tight.

The show ended far too soon a little after 11 p.m., with the band

playing one encore song and then throwing guitar picks into the crowd. Vedder repeatedly thanked the audience for coming, as if there weren't hundreds of other fans who wouldn't have gladly taken their place.

Wednesday night's show was a rare treat, which one fan enthusi-

Singer Eddie Vedder climbed to the balcony and dove into the crowd. There was an odd moment when it looked like the fans weren't going to let go of him...

astically described as, "the best concert ever!" It may have been just another gig for Pearl Jam, but

for Santa Cruz it was the show of a lifetime. Thank you for coming. Pearl Jam.