



EXAMINER KATY FAGGATZ

Pearl Jam's lead singer, Eddie Vedder, stumbled and grimaced his way around the stage at the Warfield Thursday night. Nothing he said or sang came across as remotely intelligent.

HARD, TIGHT BRUTALLY HEAVY — HO-HUM

Behind speedy riffs
and huge sales, Jam
lacks depth

By Barry Walters
EXAMINER POP MUSIC CRITIC

I'M GOING TO tell you about Pearl Jam's Thursday night show with the Henry Rollins Band at the Warfield, the official beginning of the Seattle-based, multi-platinum, so-big-it's-incomprehensible band's tour. And I'd like to do that by way of talking about another recent show, one at Bimbo's 365 Club by the British acid-jazz next big thing (not) Jamiroquai. Jamiroquai is a mostly white

funk act that endeavors to bring back the 70s funk fusion sound of the Blackbyrds and Roy Ayers. The musicians could play and the singer could sing, but the result never got past being an imitation of greatness. The grooves never quite ignited and the melodies were mostly forgettable because they rarely amounted to something more than a collection of mannerisms copied from better records. The creativity, individuality and vulnerability of great music wasn't there. The musicians simply didn't have much to say.

It's the same with Pearl Jam. The band does rock. Although its performance at Lollapalooza a few seasons back was a complete non-event, Thursday's Warfield show proved that the quintet has learned how to play harder, tighter. Scalp-

er's tickets were rumored to sell for as much as \$150 and the crowd was clearly amped just to be there.

But the mosh pit was ultimately more compelling than the band. Behind the speedy sledgehammer riffs, behind the slacker image and the astronomical sales figures, there isn't much to Pearl Jam. None of its members, including singer Eddie Vedder, has any stage presence. They hop around, stumble about and grimace in order to prove that playing money-making rock 'n' roll is hard work, but it feels like there's a black hole on the stage. It's difficult to concentrate on what they are doing because it lacks expressiveness, personality, depth. Pearl Jam is workmanlike rock for a generation that's relegat-

[See PEARL JAM, D-8]

Ho-hum evening with Pearl Jam

ed to clean up for everybody else.

There were few moments of lightness Thursday night. Even the ballads from the new, slightly more diverse album "vs." were somber, fun-free affairs. Nothing Vedder sang or said came across as remotely intelligent. The band's ability to strike up a pummeling groove was impressive, but its musicianship rarely went beyond faceless brutality. The roughness and intensity of Vedder's growl never varied. He sounds like he's singing the same notes at the same intervals with the same rhythm over every song. His technical and emotional range is extremely limited. He's a mimic of a major rock belter, not the real thing. He's so generic, he doesn't even have anti-charisma. He comes across as a regular guy masquerading as a tortured soul. The rest of the band is too blank to even think about.

Except for the occasional slow tune, every song in the set served as a soundtrack to push your neighbors around and flop across their heads. When the group took to the stage, the floor throbbed in unison and the balcony shook. Despite its marketing, Pearl Jam is as much a guy thing as most hard rock bands. Lacking Nirvana's sensitivity and smarts, these Seattle rockers don't threaten or provoke.

As such, they're able to create a big dumb unity vibe among their male fans. To downplay his standing with his female fans, Vedder keeps his hair in his face. Accessible good looks can ruin your alternative rock credibility.

Henry Rollins understands this and tries extra hard to compensate with diatribes that contradict his Ramboid physique and manner. The most hilarious contradiction during the quartet's brief extra-loud, extra-heavy set came in the middle of a song chastising folks who aren't civilized. He took a hefty swig of mineral water, spat it all out in a stream in front of him, then tried to wipe the puddle away with his bare feet. How genteel.

Pearl Jam also will perform at 8 p.m. Saturday at the Events Center at San Jose State University and at 3 p.m. Sunday at the Greek Theatre at UC-Berkeley.