

Pearl Jam is the toast of rock

• Alternative band proves its mettle in CSU concert

By KEVIN C. JOHNSON

Beacon Journal staff writer

Make no mistake about it — nobody's rocking it better these days than Pearl Jam.

No alternative rock band is even coming close to doing what Pearl Jam does on record and in concert, and that includes its closest competitor, Nirvana.

If there's any doubt, check the facts. Pearl Jam's rhythmically rocking *Vs.* has sold 5 million copies in five months of release. Nirvana's *In Utero*, which failed to produce anything as likable as *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, has sold a comparatively soft 1 million copies in six months.

And Pearl Jam's live show, which made a sold-out stop at Cleveland State University's Convocation Center Tuesday night (selling out in 31 minutes with no advance publicity), is the more memorable experience.

Pearl Jam took its audience on a nonstop rock assault, hitting the crowd over the head with a full arsenal of musical firearms.

It was a night of hard-core head-banging that kept the audience — especially those thrashing about on the floor — in a mad frenzy.

The quintet, fronted by lead singer Eddie Vedder, opened the nearly two-hour show on a somber and ultimately deceiving note with *Release* from its debut album *Ten*.

Candles placed atop speakers lit the stage as the band performed in almost complete darkness. Vedder's sullen, almost deadpan delivery coasted just above the moody and atmospheric beat, creating a mysterious effect.

Save for the candles, the set, revealed for a few moments with a brief spotlight near song's end, was threadbare.

It was a wonderful, though probably uncharacteristic beginning, and nothing following was like it.

Instead, Pearl Jam relied on its more familiar hard-rocking tendencies, following up *Release* with an explosive *Go* (a seemingly more likely opener because of its tone and title), *Animal*, *Dissident* and *Glorified G*.

The folksy *Daughter* was sewn together perfectly to the Who's *The Real Me*, which was also performed in the dark.

The Real Me was one of a couple of remakes that also included an encore performance of Neil Young's (*Keep On*) *Rockin' in the Free World*.

Other songs were *Jeremy*, *Blood*, *Why Go*, *Alive* and *Black*, with most of the newer songs per-

formed earlier on.

Vedder's voice was at all times booming and full, while the band, consisting of Dave Abbruzzese, Jeff Ament, Stone Gossard and Mike McCready, met his challenge with ease (and without introductions on spotlighted solos).

Demonstrating just how strong the band was, the Convocation Center floor was one big mosh pit — an area where concertgoers could slam dance and stage dive to their heart's content. The lighting was often focused on the pit, incorporating the hyper crowd there into the show.

The one and only letdown: the exclusion of *W.M.A.*, a funky, tribal and heavy cut from *Vs.* that would have sounded great live with its African-inspired rhythms and Vedder's distant vocals, buried deep into the track.

A fashion observation worth noting: There was enough flannel in the house to open a pajama factory, which is par for the course for a Pearl Jam concert — if it took place last year. This fad is about 6 feet under, and Pearl Jam knows it. Not one member wore flannel.

Opening band Grant Lee Buffalo gave a promising 45-minute set of alternative rock that did the job — warming the crowd up for the main attraction.