

CONCERT REVIEW

PEARL JAM

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It's been a long while since a major-buzz rock-'n'-roll show hit town. There's nothing like that feeling of event, like a huge piece of the outside world is visiting, and Thursday night's performance by Pearl Jam at Louisville Gardens was a huge event.

Before it began, people talked of not being able to sleep the night before. Some even said they didn't regret missing the University of Louisville's NCAA tournament game with Arizona. High praise in these parts.

Then Pearl Jam took the stage — and was average. For about 10 minutes, anyway. After stumbling through "Rearviewmirror" and "Whippin'," Pearl Jam erupted into "Go" and didn't look back. "Go" was full of angry start-stop tension, and it flowed right into a throbbing "Animal."

The strong stuff kept coming, including versions of "Even Flow," "Jeremy" and "Dissident." "Dissident" was especially fine, relaxed yet taut, with Eddie Vedder's vocals sliding over the guitars of Stone Gossard and Mike McCready.

By the time Pearl Jam eased into the opening notes of "Alive," the sell-out crowd was lost in the moment. The floor of the Gardens, filled by festival-style seating, was pulsing. Pearl

Jam obviously touches something at the core of the under-25 generation, tapping into that mixture of rage, glory, rebellion and celebration that defines restless youth.

Interestingly, Pearl Jam does it with music that includes more than a nod to rock 'n' roll's past. The alternative spirit is certainly in Pearl Jam, but McCready's guitar playing, for example, is strictly Ace Frehley.

Another telling moment was when Pearl Jam delivered a riveting version of Neil Young's "Rockin' in the Free World." Young, of course, is old enough to have fathered most of Thursday night's audience, but it felt like community — the heroes of the twentysomething generation ripping through a song written by the hero of, well, let's just say older folks.

King's X opened with a set that was a victim of volume. For all of its metal tendencies, King's X is a fairly subtle band, capable of tossing off wonderfully melodic bits amid its heavier moments.

But Doug Pinnick's bass was so loud that most of the tricky stuff was washed away in a near-constant rumble of feedback.

It was surely impressive that our seats were vibrating with every note, but less thunder and more clarity would have served the songs much better.