

PEARL JAM FANS TURN VIOLENT IN RUSH

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A sold-out rock concert turned ugly and dangerous on Monday night when fans tore down fences, kicked and punched members of the security force and rushed into the Bayfront Park Amphitheatre, all in an effort to be nearer to superstar rock band Pearl Jam.

Injuries and arrests were mostly minor and few, though City of Miami helicopters flew overhead and police eventually called in a riot squad to stand guard at the front of the building.

The crazed behavior of fans was at odds with the often introspective messages sung by the band - champions of offbeat, hard-edged alternative rock.

The five-man Seattle band, which has just stepped up to major headlining status, was to have played for about 8,000 concertgoers - top capacity at the general admission, outdoor amphitheater.

But more than 25,000 fans showed up and attempted to barrel their way in, according to Miami Police estimates.

"I guess nobody expected a crowd this size," said Miami police Officer Ed Blanco. "The building didn't prepare for it. That's obvious. Now they have a field force out front - a fully-manned riot squad."

"It was mass hysteria," said fan Grant Lasher of Boca Raton.

Fans distracted guards by starting fights, then rushed the stage when the security forces attended to the brawls.

Problems heightened through a long delay. Band members, who espouse anticommercial virtues, were said to be incensed over a front-of-stage billboard that read "AT&T; Bayfront Park Amphitheatre." They vowed not to go on until the AT&T; logo was covered.

The band took the stage at 10 p.m. - an hour late - then played for more than 90 minutes, with a downpour at the end of the show.

Luring teens with a loud, rambunctious mix of raw guitars and emotional angst, Pearl Jam has channeled stories of teen heartbreak and hope into two recent hit albums that have sold nearly 10 million copies over the past three years.

In doing so, the band has risen to unequalled status on the teen rock circuit, and has perhaps underestimated its own popularity.

Officials from Cellar Door Concerts, promoter of the show, said the band personally selected the venue for its off-the-beaten path allure and general admission seating policy, which permits fans to crowd to the front with almost no space to breathe.

"I'm not sure it was 25,000 fans. Our estimate is that it was only 6,000 or 7,000 more than 8,000," said Dan Barnett, vice president of Cellar Door Concerts. "We had a 170-person security force. The answer [for us] would have been a 6-foot-high fence.

"These kids are just so excited to see this band," Barnett said. "There's no controlling anyone. We had a lot of reservations about the venue. We had many security meetings. It was a stressful night."

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