



Melissa Mahan/Staff photographer

Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder sang for 11,200 at War Memorial.

## CONCERT REVIEW

### *It's great, but Pearl Jam still has way to go*

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To paraphrase the most famous line in the annals of rock criticism, I saw rock 'n' roll's future and its name is *still* Bruce Springsteen.

It's not Pearl Jam... at least, not yet.

Here's what Pearl Jam is: A damn good rock band. And, befitting the mass of candles fluttering on the altar-like amps at the back of the otherwise sparse set, Pearl Jam was a near-religious experience for many of the 11,200 who jammed the Community War Memorial last night.

There were many stunning moments: *Alive*, near the end of the show, and what seemed to be the entire arena filled with flickering lighters and the grunge young singing softly. "Son, she said..."

with dynamic front-man Eddie Vedder using a well-placed obscenity to raise the Oedipus-Complex ante on the tale of a mother and a son who takes his dead father's place.

Another moment: *Even Flow*, *Why Go* and *Jeremy* tumbling one after another from Pearl Jam's powerful debut album *Ten*. "OK, so he spoke," Vedder said after *Jeremy*, in which the refrain "Jeremy spoke in class today," seems to imply a classroom suicide. Vedder was unexpectedly steering sympathy away from *Jeremy*. "He made a mistake," Vedder told the crowd. "Living is the best revenge."

But the show's highlight came during *Daughter*, from the *Vs.* album. Again, the crowd sang softly along with Vedder. Then the music shifted slightly... "Teacher leave those kids alone," Vedder sang, just a few lines from Pink Floyd's *The Wall*. Then he segued into something else... "Nothing's gonna change my world," he sang sweetly, a line by Paul McCartney.

The mosh pit in front of the stage never slowed all night, the dancers swirling like human driftwood caught in a swollen river. But *Daughter* was the moment Pearl Jam and last night's crowd really connected.

However, Pearl Jam cannot be the future of rock 'n' roll. Not yet. Unfairly saddled by *Time* mag-

azine with the label "Official Spokesband of Generation X," Pearl Jam seems angry enough, just as the Who represented anger for its generation.

But just when the Who seemed ready to roil over the top, it would back off and laugh at its own self-righteousness. Pearl Jam, in its unrelenting devotion to this unrequited life, needs some songs about the part of life where you're driving down the beach with the top down and Charlie Sheen swilling beers in the passenger seat.

(I know. You're asking, "What Who song was *that*?")

At least Vedder shows a sense of humor between songs. "It's pretty weird getting this much attention when you've been an out-cast all your life," he said after the first encore, *Drive*.

In Vedder, Pearl Jam is working with someone quite unlike anything else in front of a rock band today. That frowzy, long hair and the thoughtful stage poses bring to mind Jim Morrison without the cheap beat-poet front.

But Pearl Jam's audience, and not Pearl Jam, is the future. It's up to Pearl Jam to grow with them.

Let's see how Pearl Jam addresses that issue. Imagine Vedder writing songs about changing diapers. Rock 'n' roll's future, as Springsteen discovered, means growing up. □