

Music Review

New songs, tributes mark Pearl Jam's cozy Orpheum show

By Michael Saunders
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After two shows at the Boston Garden, and a tour's worth of similar arenas and stadiums, Pearl Jam wanted this show to be exclusively for their fans.

This was one of the few nights on a long tour that Pearl Jam tried to reveal a bit more of themselves, to show fans some of the influences propelling the band's sound.

It was as if the band decided to throw open a musical scrapbook, and invited the crowd to settle in, sit back and listen to the past becoming the present. "So, how's this feel? Nice and cozy, huh?" lead singer Eddie Vedder said, the crowd whooping its appreciation of the band's decision to play in a small theater.

Compared to how fans characterized the first two shows, this was the most upbeat of the Boston shows, as if everyone involved was trying to lift the pall that settled in after the shock of Kurt Cobain's suicide. The set list was turned on its head, with high-attitude songs slicing through the first third of the set, and a mix of old and unreleased songs rumbling throughout the second third. The band saved favorites — theirs and fans' — for a string of emotion-laden encores.



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / BILL BRETT

Pearl Jam fans - mostly without tickets - mill about outside the Orpheum Theatre last night.

Pearl Jam gets cozy at the Orpheum

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Even the mood outside the theater bordered on festive, at least for those who knew they could get inside.

Fans clustered around streetlamps on Tremont Street, eyes hungrily searching for a sign from passers-by that someone, anyone, would have a ticket. Few people were so blessed.

Even as opening act Mudhoney closed its set, more than 200 people hoped to beat the lottery-like odds and find a way inside. Orpheum security staffers kept fans without tickets outside the alley leading to the theater door, reducing any chance of a dangerous front-door stampede.

As the showtime ticked closer, fans grew more desperate as did the people trying to prey the desperation. Would-be smooth operators lined Tremont Street, some trying to scalp tickets they probably didn't have.

For most Pearl Jam fans, any price would have been a bargain, especially for a show in a theater barely a quarter as big as the usual arenas. For a superfan like Kathy Davis of Fremont, Calif., this show was priceless. Davis co-edits a Pearl Jam fanzine and flew out from the West Coast to catch the New England dates of the tour. "I'm flying home [Wednesday] and this is the best way to end my stay."

For the twisted trip down memory lane, the band played recordings of the Circle Jerks while setting up,

PEARL JAM
with MUDHONEY

At: Orpheum Theater Tuesday night.

an homage to the West Coast hardcore-punk sound. That gave way to the eerie atmospheric strains of a snippet from Brian Eno's "Apollo" album, a fact gleaned from an energetic Davis, still incredulous that she was on the other side of the continent watching her favorite people in the world.

"I usually read about people who do this, or write about them, and now look at me - here I am," she laughed.

Before Pearl Jam took the stage, fans were treated to a look at the band's motivational rugby scrum. Bassist Jeff Ament, drummer Dave Krusen, guitarists Mike McCready and Stone Gossard, band roadies and Vedder lock arms and bring their heads together to psych themselves up for a performance. It's usually only visible from a choice backstage vantage point.

The band opened with "Oceans," then ripped into "Even Flow," which had been kept in reserve toward the end of Monday night's Garden show. And then a punk gem spurted free, the Dead Boys' "Sonic Reducer."

"We're going to play things we haven't played in a long time. We're going to play songs you might not have heard," Vedder said.

He kept his word: few in the audience knew "Hard to Imagine," a slow, soulful grind that appeared on

an early demo version of the album "Vs." Fewer still knew "Immortality," a dense, ringing song on which Vedder plugs in and adds a layer of swirling guitar drone.

Vedder even did a song from his previous band Bad Radio, kind of a jangly guitar pop cut with an edge. These unknown songs were greeted warmly, even by the fans who know only the radio hits. Up in the balcony, however, several clumps of thick-necked guys stood stiffly with folded arms during songs they didn't know, then jolted alive during "Go," "Animal" and "Glorified G." Perhaps the song "Not For You" should have been dedicated to them.

There's still a chance for redemption. Pearl Jam will perform on Saturday Night Live, then is considering a surprise, fans-only show at a New York theater about the size of the Orpheum.