

JAM UP AND JELLY TIGHT

PEARL JAM, MUDHONEY

Singapore Indoor Stadium
March 3

On a night when curtains were raised for the Phantom Of The Opera at the Kallang Theatre, attended by the Prime Minister and his regalia, a phantom of another form was wreaking his wicked sense of amusement on his 6,000 rapturous subjects, just three hundred metres away at the Indoor Stadium. No time in Singapore have we ever witnessed the mind-boggling phenomenon of sheer rock 'n' roll adulation. It's like, when Eddie waves, his congregation waves back, when Eddie sprinkles water on their

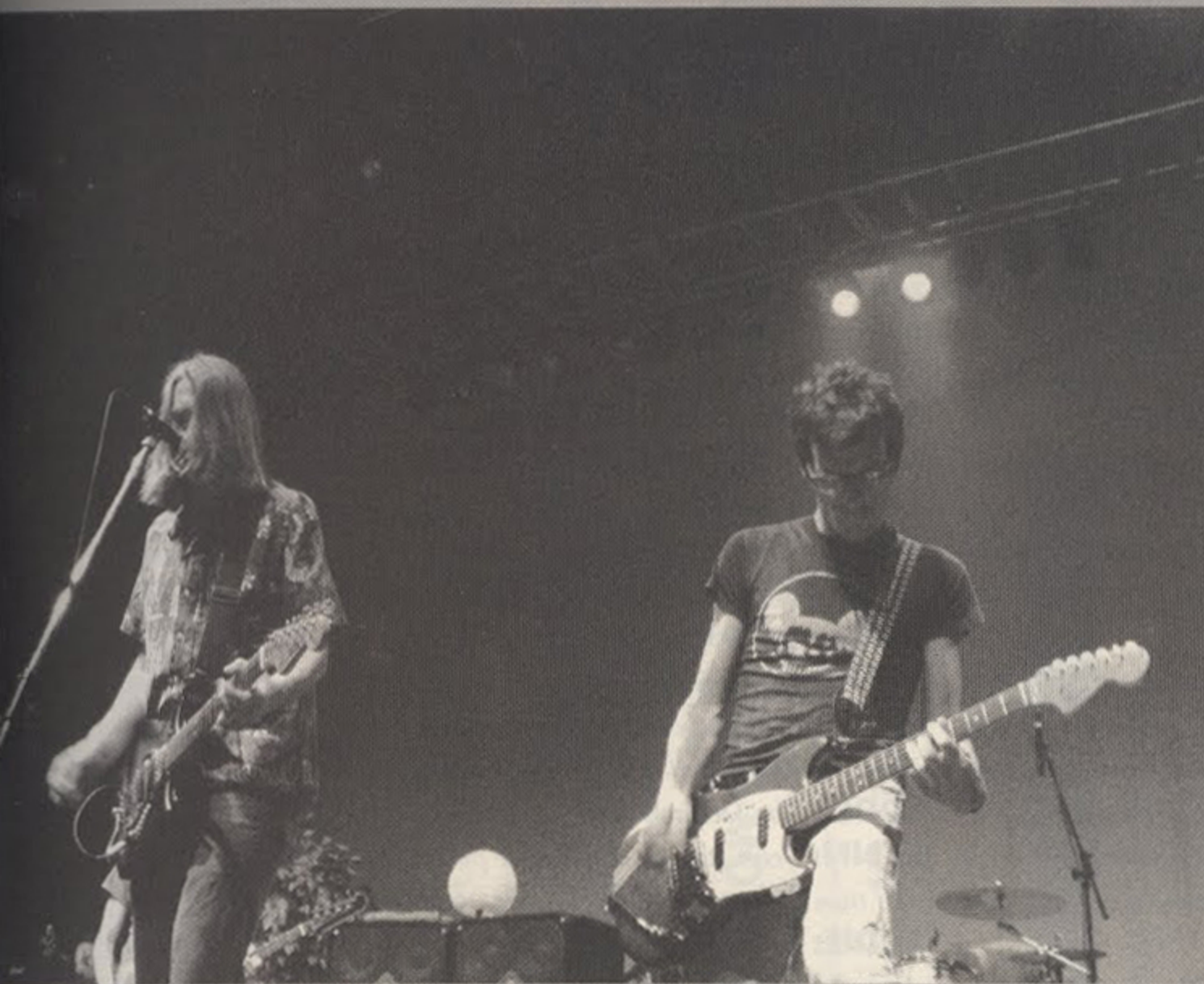
faces, they lap it up, when Eddie blows his cool, they roar him on, when Eddie does a silly-ass jig, they just love him even more.

Eddie Vedder is part man, part god but otherwise another reluctant rock star and singer of American '90s supergroup Pearl Jam (comprising ex-Mother Love Bone members Jeff Ament and Stone Gossard, ex-Chilli Pepper Jack Irons and Seattle guitar virtuoso Mike McCready). Vedder also writes songs whose phrases have wide open endings. Sample verse from Not For You, *"All that's sacred... dedications... with no power... I still remember... this is not for you,"* or tries to whip up a

tune about preserving vinyl (Spin The Black Circle) with a clumsy full-on intensity that failed to justify the subject matter anyway.

Alright, I'm not a fan, or at least not on record. Seeing the band live, and listening to all the raised voices singing in unison to songs like Jeremy and Daughter, however, made me understand that Pearl Jam's appeal has never been about cerebral insights or innovative rock, it is about cutting up all our collective angst into bite-size morsels for all to chew on.

And the feast, I must add, got off to a flying start. While then patrons at Kallang Theatre were presumably quietly seated



in their assigned places, when the lights went out at the Indoor Stadium, as Mudhoney took to the stage, all hell, or should I say barriers, broke loose. The zone where the snowballing minion then literally jumped barriers to join the \$70 sector. The ushers stood helpless, the crossover crowd ecstatic but no petty jealousy arose as all began coagulating like one big bouncing blob in front of the stage, a symbolic disregard for class divide, if you will.

Mudhoney, as grunge purists knew all along, expectedly delivered an in-your-face paradigm of the legendary sound they helped pioneer. Splitting their material equally between *Piece Of Cake* and *My Brother The Cow*, singer Mark Arm cut an authoritative figure on stage as he goaded and prodded the teenage beast. Guitarist Steve Turner was twitching like a geek on fire, charging the performance with a kind of taut energy that characterised songs like *Make It Now*, *Suck You Dry*, *Into Your Schtick* and my personal rave, *Generational Spokesmodel*. Having read *The New Paper* cover story the day before, of a student going berserk after being told to cut his hair, opportunist Arm disclosed: "When I was 15 in high school, this teacher told me to cut my hair, so I punched him in the face." The audience,

most of them standing on chairs, applauded wildly.

Having played host to numerous pop and rock concerts, it seemed incredulous how the planners and organisers at the stadium have yet to understand the concept of a dance space and the cathartic nature of live performances. At the end of Mudhoney's 10-song opening set, so many chairs were trampled on and damaged that some members of the audience had the gumption to remove them lest they caused hurt. This, of course, created panic among the authorities as they doubled back and forth deciding on whether the chairs were to remain or not. By the time the stage area was cleared of the last chair, 45 mins had lapsed and everybody's adrenaline level cooled off.

Still, it wasn't too long before the heat gets regenerated. Opening with the wistful *Release*, Pearl Jam stood silhouetted against a plain white backdrop for the full song, perhaps surveying the masses for the kill. Just as the lights hit and they let rip into *Go*, guitarist McCready and bassist Ament paced madly about main man Vedder who remained coiled around the mike stand a-la Jim Morrison, curly locks and all. Without the benefit of any back-up vocals for the entire gig, Vedder's vocals

nonetheless soared triumphantly above the twin-guitar assault of McCready and Gossard, then even his own when he strapped on the axe for songs like *Tremor Christ*, *Dissident*, *Even Flow* and *Rearview Mirror*.

The drama, as usual, happened in that volatile zone between stage proper and those frontline fanatics hugging the stage barrier. Vedder may be Pearl Jam's front man but whatever charm he may have exuded was mostly obscured by a line of muscle-bound, uptight bouncers whose job was to grab body-surfers who had heroically glided their way to the edge of the stage, shake them up a bit, and shoo them off to the side.

And just to show how thankless the job was, Vedder himself walked up to one bouncer and threatened to kick the latter's ass should he manhandle another over-zealous fan, all of which was shouted into the microphone and in the middle of everyone's anthem, *Jeremy*. What the band didn't see earlier on was how one surfer-dude retaliated and was subsequently dragged across the atrium, in full view of everyone, where he disappeared behind a curtain. No one saw him emerge.

Some concerts just peter out in the end but this one built up like a merciless power drill spiraling to its end. Drummer Jack Irons, the tireless dynamo who got my vote as outstanding performer of the evening, outdid himself with a manic drum solo, forging a bridge from *Immortality* to *Alive* whereupon Vedder's heartfelt singing aroused a booming chorus from an entire cross-section.

The ultimate highlight came during *Blood* when the usually cool Vedder suddenly saw the need to bash the stage floor with the mike stand until it made a gaping hole big enough for the stand to fall through. Then, waving goodbye, he slithered in while the rest of the band played out the last chords. Two encores ensued but of course by that time everybody was clamouring to get onstage to shake Vedder's hands that the band thought it best to loosen the reins and enact the final scene by inviting Mudhoney for a purile skit and a goofy jam-and-hop fest to a rendition of the Dead Boys' *Sonic Reducer*.

At the end, trudging amid the salty air, soaked T-shirts and clammy skin of the Pearl Jam fans as they headed for the exit door, their satiated expressions seemed to tell me, "Forget *The Phantom* or such musicals, give me rock 'n' roll anyday!" — **Martyn See**