

Sweet treat for restless young souls

By SONIA HARFORD

The posters at Flinders Park advertising the middle-aged rockers ELO and James Taylor seemed a little incongruous as legions of young Pearl Jam fans climbed the steps to the venue on Thursday night.

The Seattle-based band claims a powerful solidarity with its mostly young audience, reaching out to the "restless souls" celebrated in its lyrics.

Despite being frisked by security guards at the front gate (what were they looking for — sharp buttons on flannelette shirts?), the audience at Pearl Jam's first Melbourne gig created a good vibe: a warm, collective excitement bouncing off the back of a superb two-hour performance from the band.

Opening the concert was a well-received local band, the Meanies, which delivered a tight and heavy set thanks partly to a pile-driving bass drum and a hyperkinetic lead singer. With hair like spaghetti and clothes like Neil from *The Young Ones*, he had great stage presence.

A funky taped drum solo tantalised the crowd during the break until Pearl Jam's frontman, Eddie Vedder, appeared, warming up with a ballad. Without denying the musicianship of the other members of Pearl Jam, it is Vedder's voice — a wailing, declaiming, powerful instrument — that gives the band its character.

The band ripped through its opening numbers, which included a fast and slick performance of *Spin the Black Circle* from the *Vitalogy* album.

The Pearl Jam production style is minimal, almost pub-band simple, with just the occasional burst of sunset-orange lighting for show. But the crowd was not there for the special effects — instead they sang along with the emotive lyrics penned by Vedder.

The song *Elderly Woman behind the Counter in a Small Town* showed Vedder at his finest, his voice rolling over the notes of the melody strong and true. Like all great musicians he turns his hand as easily to ballads as to blistering rock and roll, and there was plenty of both in the show.

Not for You, with its almost laconic beat and briefly grandiose guitar riff, is surely a successor to Nirvana's *Smells Like Teen Spirit* as an anthem for young people, and the crowd sang along as a 10,000-voice choir.

Disident, with its air of panic, was a crowd-pleaser and when the band kicked into *Go* things went wild, as rows of chairs were thrown aside and people leapt over barriers to join the dancing mass on the floor.

Daughter flowed straight into a mini-medley of *WMA*, and the rhythm section worked hard on *rearviewmirror*. And scratch the earlier comment about *Not For You* — *Alive* surely has the edge as a youth anthem.

Guitarists Mike McCready and Stone Gossard, and bass player Jeff Ament, pumped out some very familiar breaks reminiscent of *The Who* — reputedly Vedder's inspiration — and built to a big finish.