

# Pearl Jam still delivers

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DENVER — Eddie Vedder doesn't take things easy. Soon after Pearl Jam started its set Monday night at Red Rocks Amphitheater, his voice started to strain; it grew dry and scratchy, then broke on some notes.

The altitude here, more than a mile above sea level, was taking a toll on his breathing: "You guys've got different air," he said.

Yet instead of conserving his voice, Vedder pushed it harder. After he finished all the lyrics of "Jeremy," he continued with rising, wordless howls that could have cracked at any moment.

Like characters in Pearl Jam songs, his voice was bruised but unbowed, and his battle with his own limits made the songs hit home.

Vedder's narrators "cannot find the comfort in this world"; they doubt themselves, they re-examine old wounds, they see-the against any temptation to compromise. In one of two new songs in the two-hour set, he sang, "I have questions I don't know how to ask." The stage set was dominated by a chandelier shaped like an oblong crown of thorns.

Although it is the most popular American rock band of the 1990s, Pearl Jam finds struggles everywhere. Its current tour of a dozen cities, including two nights at Red Rocks, has been shaped by the band's refusal to use Ticketmaster to distribute tickets.

Instead, Pearl Jam is using ETM Entertainment Network, a new company with lower



Photo by the Associated Press

**Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder had trouble singing in the high altitudes of Red Rocks Amphitheater near Denver. The band is playing smaller venues because of its running battle with Ticketmaster.**

service charges. The purchaser's name is printed on each ticket, and ticket takers here had bar-code scanners to deter counterfeiting and to build a database on fans.

Because Ticketmaster has exclusive contracts with most major arenas and stadiums, Pearl Jam is booked in some places that are not part of the regular rock circuit. Although Red Rocks is often used for concerts, other stops lack things like electricity and fences. No shows have been scheduled east of Chicago.

Even before its break with Ticketmaster, Pearl Jam was reluctant to exploit its popularity. The band has gone out of its way not to become a purely commercial proposition, a touring profit center like the Rolling Stones.

Pearl Jam could fill stadiums and charge considerably

more than \$20 a ticket, but it has tried to balance the demand for concert seats with an attempt to keep shows on a human scale. Most of its current tour dates are at arenas for 20,000 people or fewer; Red Rocks holds 9,000.

Vedder remains leery of big rock tours, even his own; backstage, he said, "If it's not fun this time, then it can't be."

With each tour, Pearl Jam has moved closer to the 1960s; on Monday, it quoted the Monkees' "(I'm Not Your) Steppin' Stone" and performed an obscure Eddie Holland song, "Leaving Here."

Pearl Jam seems determined to save its music from routine. It constructs its songs from repeated riffs, but instead of pounding those riffs into the ground, Pearl Jam wrestles with them anew in every performance.