

Pearl Jam show intoxicates

By Edna Gundersen
Gannett News Service

MORRISON, COLO. — Finally, music takes the spotlight.

Pearl Jam's intoxicating concert (★★★★ out of four) reinforced the Seattle quintet's standing as the most relevant and inspiring rock band of the '90s.

The group's feud with Ticketmaster may or may not have bolstered Pearl Jam's reputation for integrity and commitment, ingredients always present in the potent music, but it distracted from the band's considerable creativity. That side emerged before 9,000 fans at the 15-date tour's second stop, staged amid the fittingly spectacular sandstone formations of Denver's Red Rocks Amphitheater.

The high-energy show sampled Pearl Jam's finest tunes from three albums, turning dark themes of alienation and rage into joyous release. From the opening fury of "Go" to the closing guitar spasms of "Porch" two hours later, Pearl Jam infused 21 songs with passion, daring and cathartic abandon seldom evident in this era of MTV slickness.

Though capable of lockstep precision, the players spontaneously pushed each song's boundaries, adding a hypnotic turbulence to even the tamest melodies and improving on such recordings as "Corduroy" and "Spin the Black Circle." Hyperactive bassist Jeff Ament and seasoned drummer Jack Irons hammered a solid foundation for the manic forays of guitarists Stone Gossard and Mike McCready, the night's standout instrumentalist.

Yet eyes and ears rarely strayed from charismatic Eddie Vedder, an instinctive and unpretentious performer whose rich tenor can be simultaneously intimate, raw and feverish. Nervously pacing, brood-



Pearl Jam wowed a crowd of 9,000 at the second concert of their 15-date tour in Denver recently.

REVIEW

ing or flailing like a prophet possessed, Vedder sang with startling intensity and emotional honesty, injecting bile into "Animal" and "Rearviewmirror," then shading "Immortality," "Better Man" and "Black" with aching tenderness. N

The band reinvigorated favorites such as "Alive," "Daughter," "Evenflow" and "Jeremy" but also triumphed with such radio rarities as "Blood," new song "Habit" and obscure Who oldie "Leaving Here."

Don't expect a repeat. Technically imperfect, Pearl Jam's show is a work in progress with a radically fluctuating set list. (Hours before the second Red Rocks show, the band rehearsed new versions of hits plus Nick Cave's "Ship Song," then played them sitting down. "Footsteps," "Tremor Christ," "Garden" and "Whipping" were thrown in, along with Vedder's impromptu a capella take on the Beatles' "I've Just Seen a Face" and a breathtaking version of "Indifference.")

"Thanks for coming up to the mountain with us," Vedder said. Thanks for leading the climb.