

Jamheads happy as show goes on

By Ron Seely

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MILWAUKEE — They proudly call themselves Jamheads.

They have in common their devotion to Pearl Jam, a band they love not only for its music — sort of a gentler, thirty-something grunge — but for its stubborn fight to keep ticket prices affordable for fans.

For months, Pearl Jam has waged a fight, both legal and verbal, against Ticketmaster, the ticket-selling giant that the group charged was forcing up ticket prices by adding on too many service charges. Although the group's complaints were not taken up by the courts, federal officials promised to follow Ticketmaster's

Band's faithful celebrate at Summerfest

actions more closely in the future.

Saturday, the faithful gathered here at the Summerfest grounds for the first of two sold-out Pearl Jam concerts that looked as though they were not going to happen. As part of its continuing protest, Pearl Jam had canceled a number of shows on its current tour and, for a while, Milwaukee was among them.

But the show was rescheduled and that made lots of Jamheads very happy. The gang was all here, including a number of fans in identical green T-shirts who had previously met only in cyberspace

while signed on to an internet message board devoted entirely to Pearl Jam and issues that have recently included the state of lead singer Eddie Vedder's health (he left the stage during a recent show, pale and sick from the flu) and the mysteriously garbled lyrics of certain songs.

Late Saturday afternoon, these cyberspace Jamheads gathered in a tight group outside the gates of the Marcus Amphitheater as other Summerfest celebrants flowed around them. They were from Washington D.C. and Toronto and Minneapolis and San Francisco.

They wore T-shirts that said "Garden of Stone," a reference to a Pearl Jam song that also served as the name of the internet mailing list devoted to the group (it has since been changed to "Ocean").

Melinda Thompson, an unemployed 40-year-old graduate student from San Antonio, has been a Pearl Jam fan since 1991 when she taped a song from an underground Portland radio station (there were no disc jockeys and no identification of what songs were playing) and took it to a local record store to identify the artists. It turned out to be Pearl Jam's

first album and she had fallen in love with Vedder's guttural, other-worldly voice.

Women fans, especially, seem drawn to Vedder's voice. Lou Dunham, a Jamhead from Phoenix with the group's name tattooed on her chest, recalled that she was "mesmerized" by Vedder's voice when she first heard it. Since then she has traveled the country for their concerts. She loves the group, she said, not only for their music but for their unwillingness to fit quietly into the rock 'n' roll establishment. She

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likes it that the members of the group, especially Vedder, seem to despise their success (their new album "Vitalogy" is at the top of the charts). She pointed out that Vedder, perhaps the most reluctant rock star since the late Kurt Cobain of Nirvana, recently joined some pals who donned disguises to play anonymous gigs at a few small clubs.

"But," said Dunham, "I don't hold it against them that they're famous."

Thompson, standing Saturday with her newfound cyberspace Jamhead friends, busied herself scrawling lines in a clothbound book that others in the group would also sign. The plan was to fling it onto the stage during the concert.

The group constituted a walking, talking Pearl Jam encyclopedia. Asked any question about the group, they had an answer.

Pearl Jam's name? One story, Thompson said, has it that Vedder's great-grandmother was married to a Native American and that she passed word on to Vedder of a jam made from peyote, a hallucinogen used during spiritual rituals by some American Indians. The name of the concoction, so Thompson heard, became the name Vedder adopted for the group.

Such were the stories being passed around by the Jamheads Saturday afternoon at Summerfest.