

Pearl Jam at the Meadows: a gig that was worth the wait

By MICHAEL CORCORAN

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At 5:53 p.m. Saturday, the bizarre buildup to Pearl Jam's on-off-on Southpark Meadows concert was finally over, pierced by a glorious guitar rumble. The

Concert review

Seattle super-group opened with Neil Young's *The Act of Love*, from the *Mirror Ball* album, which features Pearl Jam as Young's back-up band.

To hear music — passionate, riveting music from the five guys who have made headlines for not playing — was indeed enough to drive the crowd of nearly 27,000 absolutely wild. If this youngish throng had been put through the emotional wringer by Eddie Vedder and his bandmates, who canceled the original July 2 date and then rescheduled for Saturday, they sure didn't show any bitterness.

The band also proceeded as if the only thing that mattered was the moment, and they supplied many exciting flashes. Vedder wailed with abandon, and the band lunged and lurched all over the stage looking for the magic riff and then locking in when they found it.

It's easy to discount Pearl Jam as millionaire whiners who come off a little phony whenever they open their mouths in non-song, but after Saturday's set, there's no denying that Eddie and company are one of the most powerful and moving bands in existence. This was hammered home late in the show when Pearl Jam had fans slow-dancing and mouthing the desolate daydream imagery of *Black* one minute and then the couples joyfully bounced apart during the punkish *Spin the Black Circle*.

I've seen Pearl Jam before in small clubs and mid-size venues, but they really thrive in enormous facilities like the Meadows. There, in the fields, Vedder's taste for the grandiose grew wild and the frenetic guitar interplay between Mike McCready and Stone Gossard swirled above the sunburned multitudes, threatening to suck them up with centripetal force.

As the two-hour set wore on, with the band playing songs from all three albums with an emphasis

Switch in starting time turns some off Pearl Jam

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Not all was good in Pearl Jam land Saturday.

Some fans who made long, cross-country treks just to see the Seattle group's show at Southpark Meadows in South Austin were unaware of the change in starting time from the 7:30 p.m. time printed on the tickets to the actual 4 p.m. start.

"We bought airplane tickets, flew down here, rented a car, hurried here from the airport, and it looks like all we might be able to see is the encore," said Chris Koonce, who came from Dallas and arrived at 7:15 p.m., after Pearl Jam had been playing for an hour and a half.

"I swear I listen to the radio a lot and read the papers, but I had no idea," said Rob Atha, a Corpus Christi resident who also showed up late.

Pearl Jam announced Monday that the show's schedule had changed so the band could arrive on time to its concert to-

night in New Orleans.

According to Abel Theriot, owner of Southpark Meadows, Pearl Jam sent out postcards notifying ticketholders of the time change via its ticket agency for the tour.

"There probably won't be any refunds because of that," Theriot said. "But that's all up to Pearl Jam."

Saturday's schedule change was the last straw for many of the late-arrivers, who were previously angered over the band's sudden cancellation of the original July 2 date. On June 25, Pearl Jam scrapped the final dates of its summer tour after singer Eddie Vedder became ill. Saturday's show was the make-up date.

"That's it. I'm through with Pearl Jam," said Scott Champion, who drove with two friends from Oklahoma City only to arrive well into Pearl Jam's set.

Southpark Meadows employees who took tickets from the disgruntled late-arrivers told them to call Fillmore Tour & Ticket Ltd. at (800) 545-1205.

on the latest, *Vitalogy*, the connection with the crowd grew deeper, and walking up the hill toward the back of the Meadows you could see and hear so many singing the words to such anthems of angst as *Alive*, *Daughter* and *Evenflow*. (Vedder dedicated *Evenflow*, about starting over, to Ministry's Al Jourgensen, who was recently arrested for heroin possession.)

Pearl Jam made its reputation as a serious sort of rock band with the 1991 debut LP *Ten* and its overriding theme of life affirmation. With its next two LPs, 1993's *Vs.* and '94's *Vitalogy*, the band strengthened its pipeline to the disenfranchised with such lyrics as, "All that's sacred comes from youth," from *Not For You*. No other band today inspires such devotion from its fans, but at the same time, Pearl Jam has come off as humorless mopes, with Vedder's clunky clothes and full face of hair looking like a logo of the lost.

On Saturday, though, the band definitely had some goofy fun, with Vedder walking onstage with a Panama Jack hat and three layers of clothing in the scorching heat. The band encored with the Dead Boys' *Sonic Reducer*, an obscure tune by the Hi Numbers (later, the Who) and even threw in a verse of *Talk About the Passion*, by R.E.M., who play the Meadows tonight. Then, when the moshing got a little out of hand near the front, Vedder calmed the kids and announced, "This is like *Baywatch*. We're going to save some lives and look cute doing it."

The comings and goings of Pearl Jam have sometimes been analyzed in life-or-death tones, but in the end, what the crowd got on Saturday was a rock concert. Some of the songs were boring, some of the jamming a little too indulgent, but most of what went on was purely thrilling.