

# In New Orleans, the night was all Pearl Jam

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The humidity hung heavily after a day of New Orleans-style summer rain showers soaked New Orleans City Park's Tad Gormley Stadium. But it was a blessing in disguise. Thanks to an early afternoon rain, the temperature was comfortable and the occasional passing breeze made it almost tolerable to bump into the sweat-drenched guy dancing next to you.

Although the show was not sold out as expected, the outdoor stadium was buzzing with enthusiasm from the crowd. The fans were pumped for a good show, but nobody was as revved up as Pearl Jam.

The Ramones, a pre-punk era band from the 1970s that refuses to die, opened the show with their bag of sound-alike monotonous tunes which gave the impression that they haven't changed a note from their more popular days. While they certainly didn't steal the show and the audience seemed only half interested in their music, their aggressive punk attitude was a fitting start for the evening.

But the night was all Pearl Jam.

Noting that some fans were still somewhat upset over the Fourth of July show which was cancelled at the last minute, lead singer Eddie Vedder conceded to the fans.

"This is the best Fourth of July I've ever had," announced Vedder in the middle of the show. "We appreciate your patience and loyalty. This is a great party."

And even if it wasn't the Fourth of July, and even if the show was only two months and thirteen days late, it was worth the wait.

Vedder and company did not take a break during the two-and-a-half hour show while they ripped through 23 songs from their three albums.

## MUSIC REVIEW

Forget all the hype about grunge music; the show proved that Pearl Jam is a rock 'n roll band. Although sometimes fast and furious, their music is some of the best rock and roll written this decade.

And it had to be because the geographical variety of license plates in the stadium parking lot seemed like a tour of the south with fans driving from as far away as Tennessee, Arkansas and Florida.

Demetri Ravanos, 14, rode in with several older friends from Mobile and Patrick Tucker drove six hours from Memphis to see the show.

"Why not?" Ravanos rhetorically answered when questioned why he drove over three hours to get to the show. "I'd drive twice as far to see them if I had a license."

But for all of the eager fans, many who waited in the parking lot since 6 a.m. in the pouring rain, their spirits were high.

The band was intent on making up for their overdue appearance from the first furious notes of the opening song, "Animal," to the haunting instrumental encore.

And the crowd was receptive.

By the end of the first song, several hundred prepubescent sweaty sado-masochists were inflicting bruises and cuts on each other in the mosh pit at the foot of the stage.

The band surged into "Go" and then into "Last Exit" which Vedder abruptly stopped in the middle because he noticed a fan "hit the floor" and needed help. The fan was upright and the band charged on with the rest of the

song.

"Even Flow," from their first album, really brought the crowd into the show sending hundreds from their seats rushing toward the stage. But it was the bands next tunes, "Corduroy" and "Ugly Woman Behind a Counter in a Small Town," which showcased their uncanny musical unity as the band took both songs into smooth, seductive grooves.

Vedder modestly referred to those songs which had the audience whipped into a frenzy as "just a little ditty" and he again thanked the audience for showing up.

No thanks were needed.

Vedder, dressed in cut off jeans, a dark T-shirt covered with a short-sleeved unbuttoned white oxford cloth shirt, picked up a guitar and the band rolled through "Whipping" and into "Not For You" — Vedder's response to his loss of personal privacy though fame.

The band played so tight on the next tune "Deep" that the crowd was obviously swept up in the band's enthusiasm. And "Jeremy" brought the intensity so high that the singing of the fans drowned out Vedder's own voice during the song's chorus.

"Now we are getting our second wind," said Vedder as the band dove into the unrelenting drive of "Rear-view Mirror," "Alive" and "Blood" which sent Vedder into a microphone stand-smashing frenzy. He pounded the stage with the stand, whacked some of the drummer's cymbals and then carried the twisted piece of metal around the stage like a flag.

Joey Ramone, leader of the aging opening act, showed up to sing along with Vedder on one of the last tunes and Pearl Jam finished the set with their rendition of Neil Young's "Rockin' in the Free World."

Pearl Jam wrapped up the night with an encore of a slow melodic instrumental groove and a fireworks

display (Left-overs from the canceled July 4th concert?)

In an era where rock has become a billion-dollar business and concerts are quasi-paganry, the stage had a classy look with lighting and special effects kept to a minimum.

Large simple white sheets illuminated by colored lights provided the stage backdrop and three dimly-lit chandelier-type lights were suspended over the band. A dozen

or so red candles burned on stage behind Vedder throughout the concert and a small torch burned on the right side of the stage. There were no special effects: the focus of the show was on the music.

This outdoor concert was not lacking wattage as the music could be clearly heard for several blocks

in every direction around the stadium.

For now, Pearl Jam is the new undisputed heavyweight of rock 'n roll. Forget the grunge; pass me some Pearl Jam rock 'n roll.