

FANS SIDELINED BY FLIP-FLOP IN PEARL JAM'S SUMMER TOUR

The irony of the now-shortened tour is that Pearl Jam took on the enormous task of challenging Ticketmaster and what the band felt were the company's unjust service fees in the name of fairness for fans. Yet, it's the fans who may now have to wait another year before Pearl Jam mounts another roadshow.

What had started out as a provocative stand by the chart-topping band to change perceived wrongs in the music business soon became bogged down in

unforeseen health woes, unending business questions, and rings of stress (see story, below). There is no shortage of advice about what the band's next step should be.

"They need very quickly to organize a real tour with real buildings in a significant number of markets to rebound with their fans," says one promoter.

"They showed a certain amount of integrity and trailblazing spirit to attempt to do something for the kids," adds Don

West, general manager of Phoenix Coliseum, where the band was supposed to play June 29. "Yet on one hand, it backfired miserably. I still love the band. I just wish they could concentrate on what they do best: play music."

Few suspect Pearl Jam would suffer slings and arrows if it came back with a Ticketmaster tour designed to appease frustrated fans. If that sort of agreement were hammered out tomorrow, "I'd be shocked if one kid" protested,

of the crowd." Word leaks to the local press that the sheriff's department is training riot police in preparation for the show.

• **June 10, 1995:** Del Mar GM Tim Fennell responds to the sheriff and recommends the show be moved to the afternoon, opening act Bad Religion be dropped from the bill, and the sale of alcohol be banned. He assures the sheriff, "Pearl Jam has performed in many venues throughout the United States with little or no problems, including the Del Mar Fairgrounds in 1992."

• **June 12, 1995:** Pearl Jam pulls out of the two San Diego shows. "We felt like we were walking into a trap," says Curtis.

• **June 13, 1995:** Curtis suggests Pearl Jam may contract with Ticketmaster to satisfy fans who haven't been able to see the band live.

• **June 14, 1995:** The two Del Mar dates are moved to the crosstown San Diego Sports Arena, a Ticketmaster venue that was granted a waiver by the company to host the show and honor ETM tickets.

• **June 16, 1995:** During a live call-in interview on XTRA-FM (91X) San Diego, Pearl Jam singer Eddie Vedder does an about-face and insists that the band is not considering going back to Ticketmaster, and that if it cannot create alternative routes around the ticketing company, the band will simply make records.

• **June 16, 1995:** The band opens its '95 tour at the Casper Events Center.

• **June 17, 1995:** Due to a rainstorm, Pearl Jam is forced to cancel its outdoor show at the Wolf Mountain Amphitheater in Salt Lake City. On "Late Show With David Letterman," the list of the "top 10 rejected Batman villains" includes "the Ticketmaster."

• **June 19-20, 1995:** The band plays two sold-out shows at Red Rocks in Morrison, Colo.

• **June 21, 1995:** The Wolf Mountain date is rescheduled for July 14.

• **June 22, 1995:** Pearl Jam plays before 14,400 at Cal Expo Center in Sacramento, Calif.

• **June 23, 1995:** Performing in front of the tour's largest crowd ever (50,000 at San Francisco's Golden Gate State Park), Pearl Jam makes it through seven songs before Vedder bows out with the stomach flu. Neil Young, at the show to join an encore jam, takes over with a 90-minute set with the other members of Pearl Jam. Fans boo when it's later announced that Vedder is not going to return.

• **June 24, 1995:** Citing "business problems and controversies surrounding the band's attempt to schedule an alternative tour," Pearl Jam cancels the remaining dates of its summer tour.

• **June 27, 1995:** Three outdoor shows—July 7-8 at the Milwaukee Summerfest and July 11 at Chicago's Soldier Field—are back on.

says a promoter. "They just want to see the band."

The announcement issued June 24 declaring the six remaining shows canceled came on the heels of front man Eddie Vedder's stomach-flu attack during the tour's largest outdoor show in San Francisco June 23. The release took nearly everyone outside the band's immediate camp by surprise. Many promoters got no explanation for the move. When three shows set for Chicago and Milwaukee were subsequently reinstated, the head-shaking intensified.

"I've never seen anything like it," says Bill Gamble, PD at WKQX (Q101) Chicago. Within 36 hours the station announced that the city's Soldier Field show was off (setting off a wave of depression among fans) and then on (callers thought it was the station's idea of a cruel joke). One side effect of the scheduling chaos: an even greater sense of anticipation for remaining shows. "Anytime you can be a part of something rare, it's a lot more special," says Gamble. "And unfortunately, Pearl Jam concerts are a rare thing."

What has puzzled fans and others following the tour is the reason given for calling the caravan off.

On June 13, with the impending cancellation of two San Diego shows, Pearl Jam manager Kelly Curtis floated the idea that in order to reach frustrated fans the band would soon consider contracting with Ticketmaster. But Vedder squashed that idea three days later during a radio interview.

Subsequently, the band maintained that Ticketmaster enjoyed a monopoly in the concert marketplace and urged the Justice Department to step in. But the band appeared ready to honor its original dates and to contemplate adding more shows in September and October. Pearl Jam's last significant American tour was in March and April 1994.

Yet Ticketmaster, indirectly, is the reason spelled out in the band's lone June 24 statement: "The cancellation was brought on by the business problems and controversies surrounding the band's attempt to schedule an alternative tour." No mention was made of the stomach flu that forced Vedder off the San Francisco stage after just seven songs.

The lack of information has some suggesting that "something else has got to be going on," as one involved concert executive puts it, suggesting perhaps the band's crusade had "spiraled out of control" and was exacting an unforeseen emotional toll.

"It seems there's something underlying all this that hasn't come out yet," Kevin Stapleford, VP for programming at XTRA-FM (91X) San Diego, told the San Diego Union-Tribune.

It's not a stretch to assume some band members became irked when the topic of ticketing quickly overshadowed Pearl Jam's music. Further, everyone on the tour faced the enormous pressures associated with staging concerts outside the normal channels, where permits, insurance, electricity, and staging, once mere formalities, become daily struggles. "It's like starting from scratch," says Dennis Williams, general manager of ProTix, which handles ticketing for the new Hartford, Conn., amphitheater, Meadows Music Theater. "That's got to take a toll on the band."

In the end, it is also clear that Vedder's health was a factor. Peter Schliedermeier, senior VP of ETM, the ticketing company that sold Pearl Jam's tickets, confirms that the Chicago and Milwaukee dates were reinstated because they were the final shows on the

band's itinerary, and that by then Vedder would be feeling better. (The Milwaukee dates, part of the city's Summerfest lineup, are actually being handled by Ticketmaster, since the company sells tickets for all Summerfest shows. When several other acts are on the same bill as Pearl Jam, the band generally does not dictate ticketing terms.)

The other irony in this saga is that at the outset the main challenge facing Pearl Jam seemed to be finding a company capable of selling and distributing tickets for the right price. The performance of ETM, which generally earned passing grades from fans, was perhaps the one part of the tour (aside from the band's performances) that reached expectations.

For those in the business, the cancellations stand as a loss during a summer concert season short on real star attraction. The Phoenix Coliseum invested hundreds of hours preparing security for the Pearl Jam show and spent \$20,000 for a new stage barricade. West says the building lost \$100,000 in unrealized revenues from rent, parking, merchandising, and concession sales from the show.

According to Phoenix promoter Danny Zelisko, the sold-out show would not have generated unusually large dollars for him. "But it's not being a part of the most anticipated show to happen all year that we're disappointed about, just like the fans."

That the tour could collapse was a risk the band ran from the outset. In April, Curtis acknowledged that minefields lay ahead (Billboard, April 15). "Obviously, what we're going is risky," he told Billboard at that time. "But I think, at the end of the day, no matter what happens everyone is better off. People are more conscious of what they're paying for... I just think fans are more educated about the whole [service-fee] thing."

On that point, a promoter agrees. "They definitely proved a point," he says, citing Offspring, which was able to negotiate low service fees with Ticketmaster. Coming on the heels of Pearl Jam's public attack on fees, "All [Offspring] had to do was push a button" to work out a favorable deal, according to the promoter.

"If [Pearl Jam is] trying to make a statement that live-entertainment ticketing is out of hand, I applaud that," says Barbara Hubbard, director of special events at the Pan American Center, located on the campus of New Mexico State University. Pearl Jam was to have played there June 30.

Reaction to the rug-pulling among fans was split between plain disappointment and raw resentment. At 91X in San Diego, where the band was to perform June 26-27, station PD Mike Halloran says listeners were bummed out, particularly since "they jumped through hoops to get to the shows." (It was the second time in 10 days the San Diego shows were nixed.)

Among fans gathered on the Internet, some voiced disgust. "These 'kids' have let their little boy egos supersede the happiness of their fans. They've gone too far; I'm done with them." Others scolded those they saw as jumping on the Pearl Jam-bashing bandwagon: "If you're done with Pearl Jam, good riddance. I can't believe all the sniveling, whining little babies out there."

Overall, sadness and confusion prevailed. On June 24, one fan who was headed to the New Orleans show wrote, "I'm so happy. My ETM tix arrived today. What a great 4th of July I will have!!! Talk about some fireworks!!!!" Less than one week later an updated entry read, "My 4th of July is ruined."

Play-By-Play Account Of Pearl Jam Saga Top 10 Lists, Shoe Ads Highlight Unusual Odyssey

■ BY ERIC BOEHLERT

NEW YORK—It just may go down as the most talked-about eight-show tour in rock history.

Since spring 1994, when Pearl Jam announced it would tour without Ticketmaster and began piecing together its roadshow, the band's journey has been marked with twists and turns, conquests and crashes.

• **March 1994:** Pearl Jam informs promoters that the band will tour that summer with \$18 ticket prices and that service fees cannot go above \$1.80 per ticket, well below Ticketmaster's rate of \$3.50-\$5.50. Promoters are encouraged to find ways to accommodate the band.

• **March 25, 1994:** A North American Concert Promoters Assn. memo reminds members that in light of Pearl Jam's request, Ticketmaster CEO Fred Rosen "intends on taking a very strong stand on this issue to protect Ticketmaster's existing contracts with promoters and facilities, and further, TM will use all available remedies to protect itself from outside third parties that attempt to interfere with those existing contracts."

• **May 6, 1994:** After canceling its summer tour, Pearl Jam files a memo with the Justice Department's antitrust division, claiming that Ticketmaster, through its extensive exclusive contracts with major concert venues, controls a monopoly over the marketplace, and that Ticketmaster has pressured promoters not to handle Pearl Jam shows. Ticketmaster denies the charges.

• **May 31, 1994:** A Justice Department spokeswoman tells Billboard that the antitrust division is looking into "the possibility of anti-competitive practices in the ticket industry," thereby launching an investigation that's still active today.

• **June 12, 1994:** Pearl Jam manager Kelly Curtis tells Billboard that the band will eventually tour with or without Ticketmaster, but that the band could not pull off its own tour. "If we didn't have our shit together," and the band stumbled, "it would be easy for people to point fingers at us," he says. The band begins plotting its '95 tour.

• **June 23, 1994:** A New York state judge throws out an antitrust lawsuit against Ticketmaster filed by a customer who charged deceptive practices.

• **June 30, 1994:** Rep. Gary Condit, D-Calif., chairman of the Information, Justice, Transportation, and Agriculture Subcommittee, oversees hearings on the ticketing industry. Pearl Jam members Stone Gossard and Jeff Ament testify, as does Ticketmaster's Rosen.

• **Aug. 19, 1994:** Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., drafts legislation to require disclosure of service and other charges on tickets.

• **Sept. 7, 1994:** Ticketmaster releases a statement in support of ticket-disclosure legislation.

• **December 1994:** Readers of Spin magazine vote Pearl Jam vs. Ticketmaster "the best thing to happen in the last year."

• **January 1995:** Pearl Jam representatives meet with staffers from the offices of Sens. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., Paul Simon, D-Ill., and Joseph Biden, D-Del.

• **February 1995:** Stone Temple Pilots manager Steve Stewart tells Billboard he is looking into creating a stand-alone, wristband-based ticketing system in an attempt to sidestep Ticketmaster.

• **March 16, 1995:** "Music fans are demanding to know why concert ticket prices are so outrageous—and band Pearl Jam is leading the assault," reads a press release from Reebok, announcing a promotion in which customers can win \$10 rebates off concert tickets if they try on a pair of Boks shoes.

• **March 21, 1995:** Citizens Against Unfair Ticketing announces a national public-awareness campaign to reform the ticketing industry.

• **April 4, 1995:** Pearl Jam announces its 13-date itinerary and its partnership with new ticketing company ETM. The company boasts fully automated phone lines, bar codes on the tickets to prevent scalpers, and \$2 service fees, along with 50-cent handling costs.

• **April 18, 1995:** The scheduled kickoff date at the Boise State University Pavilion is canceled because, according to Curtis, the state-run facility could not OK the ETM system in time. The new opening show is announced for the Casper, Wyo., Events Center.

• **April 22, 1995:** Tickets go on sale for the Casper show. Fans from Wyoming and neighboring states listen to local radio stations that give out ETM's Pearl Jam ticket phone number moments before the on-sale hour. Few complaints are registered with the new system.

• **April 30, 1995:** In a much bigger test, ETM sells 18,000 Pearl Jam tickets in seven minutes for a pair of Denver concerts.

• **May 20, 1995:** Pearl Jam sells out Chicago's 55,000-capacity Soldier Field.

• **June 5, 1995:** The San Diego County sheriff's department recommends in a letter to the general manager of the nearby Del Mar fairgrounds that two Pearl Jam shows slated there June 26-27 be canceled. The sheriff's internal report written in preparation for the band's show suggests 30,000-50,000 ticketless fans will show up at the fairground. Because the fair will be in full swing, the report states, if trouble does erupt, "the use of chemical agents, such as gas grenades, [would be] limited by the likely location