

Vedder and company string pearls for their hometown fans



JAMMING: Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder performs in Seattle

PEARL JAM

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Their three-year absence from touring left them a little rusty and a bit removed, but Pearl Jam were so relaxed as they resumed their road duties Monday night, they just let everything roll. And the fans soon followed.

From ticketing hassles from the non-TicketMaster agent, computer problems that erased the band's Microsoft, fan-selected set-list, to patch problems that left lead singer Eddie Vedder struggling with his guitar plug-in, the band's first show of a long-awaited 12-date North American tour (only one Canadian date in Toronto) had many hitches.

"I just saw KISS three weeks ago and they had explosions and guys flying up into the air ... can't we even get a guitar to work?" Vedder whined as he launched into *Off He Goes*, a softer selection off the band's new release, *No Code*.

But problems fit Pearl Jam just as perfectly as their no-pretence pretence. Somehow, it gives them — de-

spite all efforts to the contrary — real rock-star credibility.

For the mystique and enormous success of Pearl Jam doesn't lie in the music itself, which generally chugs along in a line that eventually breaks apart toward some giant climax that pulls you, it and everyone together again.

They don't have enough "hits" to get into the rock-star record books.

But they do sell millions of records and their fans are stalwarts at the altar. All 13,500 tickets to the Seattle kick-off date sold out in six minutes.

So what's the key? Judging from Monday night's show, it would have to be their beautiful fallibility, their wonderfully human nonsense that reminded us without words that Eddie, Stone, Jack, Jeff and Mike were just guys.

"Let me try and say this as honestly as I can, as sincerely as I can ..." Vedder mumbled pathetically, trying to somehow deny his own star status as he explained how the band refused to sell out to TicketMaster's exclusionary policies and put on their very own show instead.

"Like, we didn't have any promoter for this show ... and I want to thank all you people, and our crew and

everyone ... there's no place like home," Vedder rambled, sinking into his own morass of humility.

"I don't care ... I know that in two hours from now, I'll be drinking a beer in someone's kitchen, laughing about it all"

Eddie is trying so hard to be Everyman, he makes an ass of himself — perfect. Whether it was in the kid who climbed on stage only to be tackled, or the one who made the night with an awesome stage dive during *Alive*, Vedder did touch the crowd of pot-heads, grunge throwbacks and straight band lovers.

The music was loud. Vedder was in prime voice. And as the monstrously powerful, almost all-inclusive, two-hour set-list progressed, the band grew tighter. The energy peaked and then glided down into a mellow buzz.

As heirs to the needle-adorned crown of pompous self-destruction and the grunge legacy, Vedder and company scream about life. They preach optimism — but beneath a shroud of nihilism. They are men of the people — and yet stayed away from them for three years because of their personal belief system.

Apparently, Pearl Jam are the disease and the cure. And while that may make for a benign encounter, it proved to be quite an experience.