

# Bad gets lost in a crowd

■ **Review:** *Pearl Jam's charisma and mostly great performance make it worth the battle to get to the show.*

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SUN POP MUSIC CRITIC

In theory, the best thing about Pearl Jam's show at the Merriweather Post Pavilion Tuesday was that it afforded a chance to see one of the world's biggest rock bands in a comfortable, mid-sized amphitheater.

Making that promise all the more alluring was the fact that Pearl Jam, for all its popularity, has done little road work in the last two years. A projected 1995 tour fell apart when attempts to book shows without going through Ticketmaster-associated venues (Merriweather uses the rival ProTix service) proved practically impossible, and the band has done only a smattering of dates since then.

In practice, unfortunately, the concert was an object lesson in why big bands are not suited to smaller venues.



KARL MERTON FERRON: SUN STAFF

**One for all:** *Eddie Vedder's strong voice stoked the performance of his Pearl Jam mates.*

Parking was impossible — literally, in some cases, as latecomers were turned away from the Pavilion's own packed lots — and conditions closer to the concert were chaotic at best. Thanks to an elaborate anti-forgery check, ticket taking was a time-consuming ordeal, and those who got to the gates just as the band came on found themselves listening to the first four or five songs while packed like sardines

outside the gates. It's a wonder no one stampeded.

Inside, after passing through not one but three ticket checks in the pavilion, concert-goers trying to get to or from their seats were stymied by aisles that were as full of people as the lawn. It made the area in front of the stage look like one giant mosh pit — except that hardly anyone was moshing (no doubt because there wasn't enough [See Concert, 8E]

# Pearl Jam charisma shows venue problems the door

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room). Bad as things were, though, the crowd seemed quite content with the situation — which itself is testament to the kind of charisma Pearl Jam evinces in concert.

It helps that the band, even now, manages to come across as a bunch of average guys who just happen to be really good musicians. Singer Eddie Vedder may not be comfortable with the usual trappings of rock stardom — when fans began to ED-DEE! ED-DEE!, Vedder cut them off with a mildly chiding, “Hey, hey, none of that!” — but he doesn’t let that self-deprecation get in the way of his performance.

At the same time, Vedder’s strength as a singer never overpowered the rest of a band. If anything, his contributions only spurred on the others, as with “Evenflow,” where the staccato cadence of his vocal seemed to feed the momentum of Stone Gossard’s rhythm guitar, or “Blood,” where his full-throated fury fueled the churning, wah-wah-flavored groove.

That said, it should also be added that the band’s emphasis on instrumental energy didn’t always work to the advantage of the music. True, there were songs that benefitted from the band’s deci-

sion to stretch out a bit. It was nice to get a little more of the ferocious energy that animated “Animal,” while the groove established by drummer Jack Irons and bassist Jeff Ament on “Jeremy” was nothing short of perfect, conveying an undeniable kinetic energy without ever shortchanging the song’s melodic aspects. And when the band kicked into overdrive to feed Mike McCready’s solo at the end of “Habit,” it was easy to understand why some fans become addicted to this band.

But there were other times when the vamping verged on mere noodling, as when “Rearviewmirror” squandered its initial drive by detouring into an ostinato that sounded like the band was readying a run through “Baba O’Riley.” If they really wanted to get into a nice hypnotic groove, couldn’t they have just extended “Who You Are” instead?

Still, it’s hard to complain too much. Not only did the good far outweigh the bad, but the band did a remarkable job of balancing well-known favorites like “Porch,” “Alive” and “Daughter,” with well-chosen obscurities. Moreover, the band was especially generous with its encores, running through seven songs before bringing the show to a close with a stirring rendition of “Yellow Ledbetter.”