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**FAN-ING OUT:** Eager crowd is swept away by Pearl Jam mania at Randalls Island last night. It was the band's first show here in two years.

# Pearl Jam comes out of shell

By **JIM FARBEN**

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Pearl Jam, rock's biggest band, finally delighted Jam-starved fans last night with the first of two shows on Randalls Island — its first New York appearance since April 1994.

Under a steady stream of rain, charismatic frontman Eddie Vedder recaptured fans' affections after the two-year absence, yelling to the crowd, "I missed you. We all missed you."

Pearl Jam's explosive performance said as much.

The five-man band proved equally adept at both dense rockers and spindly ballads. Crunching numbers like "Rear View Mirror" and "Not for You" hit hard, without blurring the fleet playing that gave their beats lift.

As usual, Vedder proved a magnetic presence. Though prickly with the press and shy of photographers, he projects great passion and commitment in content.

For all the distractions caused by the band members' refusal to make videos and their difficulty with touring, last night's show reemphasized them as a solid, working rock band, once again putting the music first.

Pearl Jam's controversial absence before last night's show had been triggered by its refusal to do business with Ticketmaster, the nationwide ticket broker that has exclusive deals with many of the country's largest venues.

The band objected to what it sees as the company's monopoly in the field and to the



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**LEADING MAN:** Eddie Vedder told New York fans he missed them.

organization's handling fees, which average \$3.50 to \$5.

Earlier attempts by Pearl Jam to set up alternative ticket agencies fell apart. But recently, the band employed a small Philadelphia ticket agency called Fans Tours & Tickets that successfully distributed duets for 11 U.S. dates and one in Canada on a tour that began Sept. 16 in the band's hometown of Seattle and snakes through to Miami on Oct. 7.

Some fans at last night's

show, which sold out instantly in early August, reportedly snags in acquiring their tickets, while others found the process flawless.

And once the show got underway, complaints virtually vanished.

"I never thought I'd get to see them in my lifetime," gushed 18-year-old Jennifer Morley of Roslyn, L.I. "It's worth the wait."

The open field setup encouraged fans to mosh — which they did with abandon

last night. Listeners slammed with particularly gusto during songs from the band's earliest albums. But they likewise cheered numbers from the band's latest album, "No Code."

The band plays a second show tonight at Randall's Island.

Pearl Jam arose from the same alternative rock revolution in the early 1990s that shot Nirvana, Smashing Pumpkins and Soundgarden to the forefront of the modern music scene.

Yet the band has also drawn older fans by playing an updated brand of classic rock — combining dense Neil Young-like chords with Southern rock leads.

Last year, the band even cut an album with Young, "Mirror Ball," and performed some live dates with him.

It's devotion to rock lore aside, the grunge band has often found success ill-fitting.

Vedder shuns interviews and often complains about how his fame distracts from the music itself. As a result, Pearl Jam has refused to make videos since 1992.

The band's absence from the media has cost it some fans. Their 1993 effort — "Vs." — made history by selling nearly 1 million units in its first week of release.

"No Code," though holding in Billboard's Top 10, hasn't been selling as briskly as their earlier efforts.

Still, the band has sold more than 25 million records in the U.S.