

Pearl Jam sticks to the hard stuff

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The fan jumped onstage right in the middle of "Hail, Hail," Pearl Jam's fifth song.

He veered toward lead singer Eddie Vedder. The security guys caught him. Just before they got him offstage, he broke free again.

Paused at the lip of the Memorial Stadium stage.

Then dove, all the way over a row of guards and into the churning mosh pit.

It was that intense all night.

The members of Pearl Jam — and especially Vedder — don't particularly want to be rock stars. But they are, anyway. Friday night, they proved why.

The whole day had the feel of a Big Event. There was a sellout crowd of 28,500 — including fans from all over the country, here because the band is playing just 11 U.S. shows this year. Some fans showed up six hours early. Traffic was brutal anyway.

Vedder a better performer than poet

CONCERT

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A couple of political groups had plastered the place with anti-Jesse Helms posters. Even the guards got free T-shirts that said "SECURITY DIPLOMAT."

But all that evaporated when the lights went down.

A couple of the members of Pearl Jam are big surfers, which might explain the band's greatest gift — a swirling undertow that pulls against the guitars' forward drive and grips the band's best songs with tension.

The "Jeremy" video (a quiet schoolkid goes nuts and kills his classmates) broke the band big on MTV. But the live version was just as chilling with just the rhythm section (bassist Jeff Ament and

drummer Jack Irons) describing the horror behind Vedder's simple, "Jeremy spoke in class today ..."

Pearl Jam's new "No Code" album heads down some experimental alleys, but Friday night the band mostly stuck to the hard stuff — driven by the guitars of Stone Gossard, Mike McCready and sometimes Vedder himself. "Spin the Black Circle" pounded, "Better Man" pulsed, "Not For You" howled.

Many Pearl Jam fans pore over the band's lyrics like tea leaves. Truth be told, Vedder isn't much of a poet — but he is a great performer, gritting out each song through a perpetually clenched gut.

The problem is, he seems to be a nice guy in a business that eats up nice guys — maybe that's a



JEFF SINER/Staff

Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder at Memorial Stadium on Friday.

reason the band so rarely tours.

Every couple of songs, he stopped to make sure the fans at the front of the stage weren't getting squished: "Everybody OK?"

Later on, in "Animal," he sang about how he'd rather hang out with animals than people.

He doesn't mean it.