

# Pearl Jam worth the trouble

By Steve Belli

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CHARLOTTE — So was it worth it?

Was it worth smashing the redial button on your phone thousands of times to get tickets?

Was it worth the struggle to find a parking space and squeezing nearly 30,000 people into the little-used Charlotte Memorial Stadium?

Despite recent criticism Pearl Jam's tour was causing headaches to its own fans, the alt-rockers lived up to their image as one of alternative rock's greatest bands in a sold-out performance Friday.

Most of the tour stops were in smaller cities or little-used venues because the band is boycotting Ticketmaster over a dispute about service charges. That stance has led some to wonder if the members of Pearl Jam are really looking out for the fans or are they just a bunch of cry-babies?

But fans with other concerns, such as disappointment that the band's new album, "No Code," is jam-lite, were relieved by the performance. Pearl Jam raged with fury through the night, spending little time on the softer, introspective side of the new album.

With the warmth of flannel protecting many fans against the cool

## CONCERT REVIEW

night air, security found it necessary to keep the crowd from getting too cozy — and too smushed. They refused to start the show until the crowd took a few steps back to relieve pressure from barricades and the army of security guards in front of the stage.

The pressure finally shifted from within the restless crowd to the band, which didn't exactly come out swinging, electing to start the show with the mid-tempo "Sometimes" on a candle-lit stage.

Singer Eddie Vedder addressed the crowd early, and surprisingly often, during the performance.

"We're going to get going in about 30 seconds," he warned the audience. "Let's not have too much of that spinning kid stuff or someone's going to get hurt."

A party pooper perhaps, but not as moody and pretentious as one might have predicted.

While Vedder often takes both the praise and the heat for the band, bassist Jeff Ament, guitarist Stone Gossard and new drummer Jack Irons displayed power. And it sounded great.

The band barreled through a

playlist similar to past shows, with songs that included "Hail, Hail," "Rearviewmirror," "Spin the Black Circle" and "Alive." Vedder was alive as well with fiery anger on "Not for You" and a fierce "Habit," which he dedicated to an unnamed "60-year-old who thinks like he's 1,060."

The crowd's own singing on the popular "Jeremy," "Black," and "Better Man" rose above Vedder's vocals.

Then the crowd apparently got out of hand again. But this time it was Vedder himself who gave the command — and as if he possessed some magical power, the audience took two steps back in unison, like a marching band.

With the upcoming election, the night took on a more political tone toward the end of the show.

"We don't have to wait. The future is now," Vedder told the crowd.

Before the encores, pro-choice activist Gloria Steinem also spoke to the audience, encouraging the youth to vote and earning a mixed reaction from the crowd.

The encores included "Who You Are," "Even Flow," "Daughter," a rockin' cover of Eddie Holland's "Leaving Here," and a concert-ending "Yellow Ledbetter."

As difficult as Pearl Jam has made it to see them in concert, they didn't disappoint.