

Pearl Jam rocks 25,000

Band cuts loose and gives fans what they wanted

By SEAN PICCOLI
Music Writer

Two storms threatened the Pearl Jam concert Monday night at Fort Lauderdale Stadium — one from the sky and one from the ground — but neither materialized.

On the last stop in a strange and sometimes beleaguered North American tour, the Seattle band simply rocked the house.

Pearl Jam played an energetic, even cheerful set untouched by rain from far away Tropical Storm Josephine, and largely free of the incidents that had marred previous dates.

Dozens of people were, however, treated for injuries sustained mostly in the mosh pit that seethed in front of a giant, black-draped stage. Paramedics reported an "overwhelming" number of cases of heat exhaustion and hyperventilation, coupled with lacerations, falls, bruises, and people passing out stone drunk.

Fort Lauderdale police reported no arrests or unruly crowds like those that disrupted a recent Pearl Jam concert in Hartford, Conn.

"Last night I got on my knees and I said a prayer," Pearl Jam singer Eddie Vedder confided half-jokingly to a crowd of 25,000, the largest ever inside the city-owned spring baseball park. "I said, 'Josephine, get away from here.'"

Josephine, which struck North Florida, obliged, leaving Vedder and his bandmates to their work, which progressed nicely over the course of a more than two-hour performance.

The band opened with *Sometime*, the first song on the new album *No Code*. Pearl Jam gave the whispery song a muscularity it lacks on the album and furnished other songs from the oft-maligned disc with a strength, sharpness and vitality that might lead listeners to conclude that *No*



Staff photo/PRESTON C. MACK

Pearl Jam lead singer Eddie Vedder wows the overflow crowd of 25,000 in Fort Lauderdale Stadium on Monday night.

Code works better as a live concert than a studio album.

Hail, Hail, also from the new album, swung between dynamic extremes, loud and soft, and loud again, with Vedder and the band surfing the shifting moods elegantly. *In My Tree*, one of the best yet least discussed songs on *No Code* roared with an elemental power provided by drummer Jack Irons.

His addition to the band has given the live shows an enormous boost, audible in nearly every one of the 28 cuts Pearl Jam played.

Pearl Jam, noted for its grudging relationship with fame and the trappings of stardom, cut loose Monday and gave fans what they wanted.

The set included all of the band's hits and fan favorites: *Animal*, *Dissident*, *Corduroy*, *Better Man*, *Jeremy*, *Black*, *Alive* and *Even Flow*.

Pearl Jam also tossed out some surprises, most notably a first-ever live playing of *Satan's Bed*. The band seemed comfortable and at ease with itself, drinking in the atmosphere of its songs as freely as the cool winds that swept the audience on the field.

Immortality was full of dreamy, kaleidoscopic changes in tone and melody. *Present Tense*, which Vedder called "probably my favorite song off the new album," was a study in immersion with its meditative vocals and enveloping instrumentals.