

Songs of a muddy muse

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LED by grunge guru Eddie Vedder remains Seattle's Pearl Jam remains one of pop's biggest cults, sellings lots of records and pulling big audiences while still managing to stand well outside the mainstream.

Their debut album, *Ten*, was their biggest seller, and it put them next to Nirvana in the major rock phenomenon stakes, but since then The Pearlies have struck out towards the left field, releasing uncommercial sounding albums like *Vs* and *Vitalogy*, both of which still topped the charts.

Their current album, *No Code*, has kept the communication lines open, although Vedder's increasingly obtuse lyrics seem more and more like the meanderings of someone with his eye permanently on the navel region.

The Vedder boys came to Dublin's Point on Saturday night, after first stopping off at Millstreet in Cork last Thursday, and the faithful who gathered in force were met by a ring of steel around the moshpit, a sign that the concert organisers were taking no chances.

During the gig, crowd surfers were hauled off by security staff, and their arms were tagged with indelible ink before they were sent back into the audience no doubt this mark of the mosher will soon become a badge of honour among the young and reckless.

On stage, Eddie Vedder looked every bit the reluctant messiah, keeping his head down and his movements to a minimum, concealing his charisma by playing the part of just another guy in the band.

Thus, for much of Pearl Jam's set, it really was heads down, no nonsense, pseudo intellectual punk, as guitarists Stone Gossard and Mike McCready poured out the power and Vedder topped it off with his would be words of wisdom. Sadly for those of us seeking Eddie-fiction and enlightenment, the lyrics were mostly inaudible among the grunged up riffs, so we couldn't catch every nuance of the singer's somewhat muddy muse.

Luckily, however, the crowd knew all the words to classic Pearl Jam anthems like *Even Flow*, *Jeremy* and *Alive*, but it was left to Vedder to find his own way through the maze of disjointed ideas which typify the band's more recent material. Songs like *Lukin*, *Habit* and *Mankind* (the latter sung by Stone Gossard) are tuneless aimless misadventures in hi-fi which sound like they were cobbled together just to prop up Pearl Jam's rather unwieldy myth. The energy was there, the commitment was there, but there was nothing solid to keep it grounded, so the music simply hung in mid air like an ominous sonic cloud waiting for the wind to come and blow it away.

Instead of a fresh breeze, however, the encore brought the overblown bluster of Who You Are, the band's most recent hit, a stumbling, hippiedippy vision quest which tripped over its own mock mysticism. The dusty ballad Off He Goes worked a bit better, The Pearlies putting their ragged creative thread to appropriate use. But, as they shuffled off stage to thunderous applause, I was still unable to prise any pearls from underneath the dull, mottled shell.