

PEARL JAM FANS IN AWE AFTER SECRET SHOW

BAND'S SURPRISE GIG LEFT THOSE OUTSIDE CLAMORING
FOR A GOLDEN TICKET.

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SANTA CRUZ, Calif. -- Pearl Jam fan Andrew Kates was ready for a big night. Just how big? No one was sure.

Not even Kates.

Eddie Vedder and the rest of PJ were in town, preparing to appear at a small club, the very one Kates was standing outside Wednesday evening. Right then, he was as close as most could get to the action.

And, what's more, in his hand was a golden ticket.

"The rumor is that Neil is going to be here," said Kates, speaking, of course, of the legendary Neil Young, a friend of the band who was, coincidentally, celebrating his birthday that night.

Kates was one of several hundred keyed-up fans milling around the Catalyst club, soaking up the atmosphere, getting a beat on the latest rumors and generally getting psyched for Pearl Jam's first live performance of the year. They came from as far away as Alaska for this chance. "And Keith [Richards] and Mick [Jagger] might show up," Kates said about the no-show Rolling Stones leaders, heaping grist onto the rumor mill as he sipped from a plastic cup filled with his special pre-show concoction. "I'm doing the mix of coffee and beer. Perfect for tonight."

Kates was one of two kinds of Pearl Jam fans loitering on the sidewalk outside the club, facing the sleepy college town's shop-lined Pacific Avenue. Those that had the golden tickets (white actually, with some colorful flowering vines along the edges) to see Pearl Jam -- otherwise known that night as "Honking Seals" --and 150 ticketless people waiting in a line that snaked down the block and that over the course of the damp, chilly evening came to be known as the "hopeless line."

Opie Bundgaard, 29, was one of the latter. And still he had high hopes. "I can't believe I got down here just in time," he said, keeping his ears open for the rare offer of a spare ticket, some of which were scalped for \$200. "I just came down from Half Moon Bay last night," added the hippified fan, who fit right in with the town's crunchy locals. Asked if he'd be upset if he didn't get in, Bundgaard said, "Hell yeah, I'll be disappointed. I came all the way from Alaska."

As the clock struck 8:30 though that night, and the first strains of the speedy punk from San Jose's Odd Numbers started leaking out the front door, Bundgaard began to lose the hopeful glint in his eyes.

Despite repeated assurances from the club's burly doormen that no more tickets would be sold for the show, the citizens of the "hopeless line" stood firm, each finagling one way or another to get into the highly-anticipated show. One woman tried sneaking under a doorway into the restaurant next door, only to get booted out by a smiling cook. Another licked her arm and tried to transfer the two stamps on her friend's inner right forearm. No dice.

Those who did make it in, the ones who'd somehow gotten word of the secret show, a warm-up to the band's four dates opening for the Rolling Stones (Nov. 14-15 and Nov. 18-19) at the Oakland Coliseum, tried not to rub it in, even as they grinned their way to the door.

"I got here at 4 a.m.," said 16-year-old Jeff Gretzner as he waited in line to get in. "I used to be more into rap, but now I'm into real music," he said, laughing. "*Ten* is my favorite album. This will be the first time for me seeing them. I know it's gonna be really good."

Sporting a well-worn Pearl Jam shirt from a previous tour, Darrell Gretzner, 20, Jeff's cousin, said there was no way he'd miss the show. "I flew up this morning from Ontario Airport," he said. "I've been a fan since the first album. It's a big deal, oh yeah. I wouldn't sell my ticket for anything."

Inside the 840-capacity club, Ryan Holmes, 25, a banquet waiter, pushed his way to the front for the full effect. "I was in the pit all night," he said "The energy was great and it was a real old school pit where people help you up if you fall down."

After the gig, during which the band reprised several old hits, including: "Corduroy," "Hail, Hail," "Evenflow" and "Alive," as well as the four new songs, "Brain of J," "Given to Fly," "Wish List" and "Do the Evolution," "great" was the only word most fans could summon to describe the 85-minute show.

Bria Weldon, 23, however, was not one of them. "I thought it was a good warm up for their current tour," she said. "It was fun and short," she continued, "but nothing too outstanding. They didn't play anything but their singles and seemed a little rusty, so I wasn't really blown away." Of the new songs that Pearl Jam played, Weldon enjoyed "Wish List" the most.

However, she added that she "really didn't like the last new song they played," the high-octane "Do the Evolution." "Eddie was just screaming a lot. I really didn't like it."

Still, she was among the few who left unfulfilled. "Everyone was smiling and really stoked to be there," Holmes said confidently. "It was a really positive vibe. People were really into the music. I didn't see anybody talking too much, except maybe to turn to the person next to them to say 'Man, this is really great.'"