

PEARL JAM KICK ASS AT SECRET SHOW

SEATTLE ROCK 'N' ROLL OUTFIT PREVIEW NEW SONGS
AND TURN UP THE VOLUME FOR OLD FAVORITES.

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SANTA CRUZ, CALIF. --"How did we get here?" Pearl Jam singer Eddie Vedder jokingly asked the wide-eyed sell-out crowd packed into Santa Cruz, Calif.'s 800-capacity Catalyst club on Wednesday night, midway through his band's surprise gig. "Why Santa Cruz? It comes down to one thing. El Nino. Warm water, big swells."

Vedder could have said it was earthquakes and hand grenades that brought his band, billed as the Honking Seals, back to the small club where they had played a similar secret gig just as *Vs.* was released four years ago, and the audience wouldn't have batted an eye.

Folks lined up three days earlier when word first broke that Pearl Jam would be playing this intimate club gig as a warm-up to Friday's first (of four) opening slots for the Rolling Stones at the decidedly less intimate Oakland Coliseum.

One couple brought a Futon and spent at least one chilly night on the sidewalk, while Opie Budgaard, 29, flew in from Alaska with no guarantee of a ticket. "Hell yeah I'll be disappointed if I don't get in," he said while standing in line outside the club.

For those who did score a \$20 ticket, the band didn't disappoint during the 85-minute show, their only live appearance of the year so far. Opening with six classic songs in a row, the Seattle rockers gave the crowd what they wanted from the opening salvo of "Sometimes," which Vedder performed with only the glow of a single bug-lamp lantern illuminating his crown of hair, through songs such as "I Got ID," "Corduroy," "Hail, Hail," "Dissident" and "Evenflow," during which the crowd seemed to literally vibrate with energy.

The real treat for fans like 19-year-old Jared Kelly, who became a mini-celebrity just hours before when a local news crew filmed his purchase of a \$180 scalped ticket, was the chance to hear a handful of new songs from the band's upcoming album, *Yield*, due next year (

excerpt). "I've seen them five times," said Kelly breathlessly after the show, "and this one was the best ever! I saw their 11-4-95 show and they played [the new song] 'Brain of J' and it was not nearly as good as tonight."

Kelly, whose friend Heather Powell had paid \$200 for a ticket, said he'd already heard the reported first single from the album, "Given to Fly," as an MP3 file on the Internet.

Vedder bounced around the stage on his toes like a shadow-boxer when he wasn't gripping the mike with both hands or playing guitar. "Ah, maybe Santa Cruz isn't the best place," he kidded, clearly enjoying himself. "I just remembered, Detroit. Detroit deserves it more. Or Cleveland. Yeah, now that I think about it, you guys are so fucking spoiled. Now we're gonna spoil you some more and play some new songs."

With that, Pearl Jam tore into the uptempo "Brain of J," followed by the classically PJ ebb-and-flow of "Given to Fly," after which Vedder and bassist Jeff Ament gave each other a fist bump as seeming proof that the new songs had passed the audience test. The band then unveiled a moody new number that appears to have been heavily inspired by their close association with Neil Young. The wistful "Wish List" had Vedder wishing he was everything from the star atop a Christmas tree, to an alien, to a neutron bomb, piling up so many wishes that by the end he muttered, "I wish, I wish, I wish I was, I guess I better stop," as the music came to an abrupt halt.

The set roared to a close with the combination of "Off He Goes" and a searing "Last Exit," during which Vedder shed his brown shirt and let out a series of guttural screams. He teased the audience by saying "this is your first chance to 'do the evolution' (a reference to a new song)," instead launching into "State of Love and Trust," during which he faked a stage dive, perhaps fearing the adoring, synchronized-pogoing crowd might not send him back to the stage this time.

With the flickering of a disco ball, the band then clamped down on a fourth new track "Do the Evolution," prefaced by a Vedder wail. "It's Evolution, baby," he screamed as he shook his head side-to-side, then swayed back and forth as Ament and guitarist Stone Gossard stepped to the microphone for the first time all night and added some falsetto backing vocals.

When the band returned for an encore, Gossard admitted that they were just "getting our sea legs, we haven't played live in a while."

Vedder took a moment to whip out his cell phone, telling the crowd it was "Neil's birthday," referring to Young. "Hey Neil, it's Ed, we wanna sing 'Happy Birthday' to you."

Once the crowd had serenaded Young, much to Vedder's amusement, the band leaned into "Immortality," during which drummer Jack Irons performed a very Keith-Moon-like drum jam, bashing the cymbals within an inch of their lives. The show ended with a hushed "Once" and a crowd-pleasing rendition of "Alive" that sounded just as huge and anthemic as it would in a stadium filled with 15,000 more rabid fans.