

# Calmer karma at Eddie's rock-a-rama



**Rock**  
**Pearl Jam**

IT'S A GREAT rock moment. During *Alive*, from Pearl Jam's debut album and the song that closes the main set, singer Eddie Vedder pulls a male fan up beside him to share vocals on the chorus, then partners him in a tango-cum-two-step — dip and all — across the stage. Judging by the look on the young man's face, it's possibly the greatest moment of his life.

The Pearl Jam of 1998 are a relaxed, seemingly more content outfit; gone is the outwardly obvious angst that defined their grunge days, when they rose to prominence with such bands as Nirvana and Soundgarden.

It's reflected in the sparse stage set (backed by five large candles flickering away throughout the show), opening song *The Long Road* and some of the material aired from the latest album, *Yield*, such as *Faithfull* and *Wishlist*. And a few years ago, would Vedder, as he did on this night, pause mid-chorus on *Jeremy* to comment: "No more big guys" as a behemoth of a man stage-dives knees-first into the moshpit?

Unlike the band's last visit, in 1995, there's no riotous behavior on the audience's part. That doesn't stop them crowd-surfing to their hearts' content — and there's plenty of full-throttle rock, new and old, giving them plenty of reason to do so: *Do the Evolution*, *Even Flow*, *Brain of J.* and *Animal*, to name but a few.

The packed crowd for the first of the three sold-out shows can't get enough of it, baying for more even after a three-song encore comprising *Brain of J.*, *Better Man* and, as Vedder describes it, a "happy song", *Smile*, from the *No Code* album.

Unlike many touring bands, Pearl Jam don't rely on their latest product for material. Indeed, the back catalogue is admirably covered — and, of course, it makes the task simpler when it's such a *strong* back catalogue.

It's easy to forget how many fine songs Pearl Jam have penned over the years, but when *Jeremy*, *Daughter* and *Given To Fly* are reeled off back to back, then *Rearviewmirror*, *Not For You* and *Black* follow, we're reminded in spades.

This is rock trimmed of all the fat — unlike a certain Manchester band the previous night. There's little in the way of grand rock endings and every guitar break — courtesy of Mike McCready, a bespectacled Stone Gossard and, on occasions, Vedder — has its place, while bassist Jeff Ament and drummer Jack Irons provide the solid underpinning.

The lights have barely dimmed after the initial encore and the effervescent Vedder is back on stage, thanking the crowd and *meanin'* it, urging his bandmates to return. They bring down the curtain on the 110-minute show with a incendiary version of Neil Young's *Rockin' In the Free World*. It practically brings down the house.

Grunge may be dead and gone, but Pearl Jam remain in rude health.

📍 At Melbourne Park, 2 March  
Review by **Gary Moore**