

Guitars loud and lively as Pearl Jam packs Alpine

By **Natasha Kassulke**
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EAST TROY — It was the jam part of Pearl Jam that got fans' attention during the band's sold out concert Friday at the Alpine Valley Music Theatre.

The two-hour two-encore concert was followed by another Pearl Jammer there Saturday night.

And the concert was exactly what you'd expect from ambassadors of the Seattle scene: rough edges and roaring guitar served warm and without the garnishes.

The band pelted out the show opener, "Do the Evolution," with raw metal licks and Eddie Vedder's scratchy vocals.

Then they mixed up the next several songs so bad that they didn't bother starting over.

Vedder didn't rant or preach the way he has at other shows. But he missed a teachable moment, with a crowd of 35,000.

Instead, the emphasis was on the loud and lively guitar jams of Vedder, Jeff Ament, Stone Gossard and especially Mike McCready who stood out on such songs as "Given to Fly" and "Even Flow."

Matt Cameron, former Soundgarden drummer, sat in. There was no sight of former Red Hot Chili Peppers drummer Jack Irons who played on "Yield," Pearl Jam's most recent release.

But few fans noticed Irons' absence as they fixated on Pearl Jam's manic singer.

Theatrics were limited to strobes, candles, mirror ball and colored lights. Vedder mocked what little video production there was by flipping a middle finger at a screen showing live band close-ups.

The show spanned the band's career, from the multi-platinum "Ten" through "Yield."

Between puffs on cigars, cigarettes and

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joints (even Vedder took a hit), fans yelled along to "Wish List," "Better Man," "Alive" and "Daughter."

The music helped fans forget the hassle at the gates when they were told umbrellas, towels, and blankets weren't allowed.

The no-blanket no-towel rule was by the band's order. Did they think we might snap someone with a towel or fall asleep on a blanket?

No chance of that. Songs such as "Dis-sident" were too loud and fast-paced for bedtime.

Fall asleep and you would have missed Vedder's sprint to the microphone after almost missing the opening lines to "Even Flow," wave to his brother in the audience, and slurp from a bottle of red wine, spilling so that it dripped from his lips, making him look all the more a madman.

Or you might have even missed Vedder praise a Ford Pinto with bumper sticker that said: "Escape From Wisconsin."

But there was at least one reason Pearl Jam came to play Alpine Valley.

Vedder said they grew up on and admired the music of blues-rock guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughan who was killed in a 1990 helicopter crash at Alpine Valley.

Another rock legend, Frank Black, opened for Pearl Jam. The former Pixies frontman treated older fans to the Pixies' "Wave Mutilation," and introduced his new band, The Catholics.

Black's clever songwriting, however, was lost on a crowd too busy buying Pearl Jam T-shirts, socks and hats.

They were like kids in a candy store. Only without parents there to reign them in.