

Pearl Jam's sharp, clean rock plays well to sing-along crowd

By TOM JACKMAN

Staff Writer

Along with Nirvana and, perhaps, Smashing Pumpkins, Pearl Jam assumed the mantle of spokesman for a generation of alienated youth, while recording some of the most influential music of the '90s. What to do, then, when "big rock star" status arrives and you're no longer angry or alienated?

Put your head down, play the songs hard and true, and simply grin and nod at the contradictions of personally cathartic lyrics being chanted happily by amphitheaters of 20,000 night after night. Pearl Jam continues to write and play hard-driving, meaningful rock that is best performed in a sweaty club of 500, with a violent mosh pit beneath the stage and the rest of the audience absorbing the true emotion of American poverty and frustration.

But that can't happen. So here was Pearl Jam at last, firing off sharp, clean versions of "Corduroy," "Brain of J" and "Dissident" without the emotion or anger that marked the group's

ON STAGE

ROCK MUSIC REVIEW

- **Who:** Pearl Jam
- **Where:** Sandstone Amphitheatre, Bonner Springs
- **When:** Friday, July 3
- **Audience:** 18,000 (sell-out)

sharp ascent to the top. Ex-Soundgardener Matt Cameron's drumming on "Faithful" was powerful, yet the band was doing little besides re-creating its studio versions.

"Jeremy" appeared early, and a huge crowd sing-along seemed incongruous with a song about child abuse. But Eddie Vedder's used to it, and on "Wishlist," the audience sprang its hands in the air as he sang, "I wish I was a sentimental ornament you hung on the Christmas tree." Vedder stepped back from the mike and almost grinned.

Though there were few rearrangements, "Even Flow" smoked at a slightly faster pace,

juiced by Mike McCready's guitar solos, and the crowd was wired. Minutes later, "Alive" again drew a crowd sing-along for Vedder's confessional about finding out his father isn't who he thought he was. Inappropriate but unsurprising. On this night, "Black" and "Spin the Black Circle," even darker, more personal songs, weren't played. Vedder introduced "Go" as "Don't Go" to close the set.

The encore avoided the issues of stardom and introspection and headed straight for rock. After "Nothingman" and "Better Man," solidly rendered, "Do the Evolution" was harsh and fiery. "How many days did it take for man to create God?" Vedder asked after the song, to reinforce its point. Next, the Neil Young-influenced "Smile" sparkled, followed by a ferocious version of Young's "Rockin' in the Free World" as a sensational closer, nodding to the group's spiritual godfather, acknowledging disaffected spiritual brethren, and pacifying those who just wanted to pogo.

It's tough making everyone happy, yet Pearl Jam was equal to the task.