



Jim Poulis/The Arizona Republic

Pearl Jam's usually mopey lead singer, Eddie Vedder, let his hair down a bit during Wednesday's concert at Veterans Memorial Coliseum.

Pearl Jam's luster waxes and whines

By Randy Cordova
The Arizona Republic

Sometimes brilliant, sometimes painfully wheezy, Pearl Jam's stand at Veterans Memorial Coliseum veered wildly back and forth between both ends of the spectrum.

A fast *Corduroy* was the song the guys used to kick off Wednesday's set, and it had a spiky, raw energy that continued for most of the night. And with the Coliseum floor turning into a sea of writhing bodies constantly in motion, that energy was evenly exchanged.

With leader Eddie Vedder less understated than usual, the five-some jelled fairly quickly. Soundgarden drummer Matt Cameron — substiting for Jack Irons — provided a punchy backbeat and already has established a comfortable chemistry with the four regulars.

Vedder's looseness probably was the most unexpected aspect of the show. At times, he was actually kinetic, a nice change from the pope-of-mope attitude he used to affect.

He also was hard to touch in the vocal department. On softer songs, such as the lovely *Wishlist* (from the current, underrated *Yield* CD) and *Elderly Woman*, he delved deeply into the melodies of the songs, creating some luminous moments.

Generally, the *Yield* material provided the strongest moments, if not the most sentimental, for the crowd — which favored Nike, not flannel, by the way. *Brain of J.* featured a proto-punk beat, a screaming vocal and bobbing-and-weaving exchanges by guitarists Mike McCready and Stone Gossard.

Given to Fly simply was perfection, making the audience believe it could.

Unfortunately, on a couple of songs — *Jeremy* and the expectedly rowdy *Evenflow* — Vedder moved into angst-filled posturing that bor-

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With Spacehog, Wednesday at Veterans Memorial Coliseum.

dered on caricature.

Eight years since the group's debut and millions of dollars later, the guys should be beyond that kind of hollow facade.

Even stranger was Vedder's dedicating the song *Black* to "Ev Mecham, a guy who has a problem with the word White."

It was a nonsensical jab at an easy target — Mecham is the Kathie Lee Gifford of state politics, someone it doesn't take a lot of wit to knock.

It cast an odd pall on the song, an atmospheric, emotional number

that has nothing to do with racial issues.

If that was puzzling, it was better than Vedder screaming, "Let's rock!" without any noticeable trace of irony.

He also told jokes about Arizona's July heat that would have been dusty in the days before statehood.

It didn't help that the show was staged at the creaking Coliseum, perhaps the Valley's most arthritic concert venue.

But with America West Arena hosting Nancy Kerrigan and company and Desert Sky being a Ticketmaster outlet, the Suns' old home probably was the only suitable outlet.

In terms of acoustics, the Coliseum is absolutely wretched: a blurry black hole of echo and fuzz from which no sound escapes untouched.

Even though the volume wasn't terribly loud, not a whole lot was decipherable.

Even when Vedder simply spoke to the crowd, you had to listen carefully to pick out the words.

Then again, maybe that was part of the charm for the sold-out crowd of 14,000; after all, it's the same spot the band visited on the "Summer of Discontent" tour in 1995. Ah, memories.

Opening act Spacehog had a 50-minute set that pulled heavily from the band's current *The Chinese Album*.

Pretty diverting on disc, the music's fun, glammy edge was flattened out in a concert setting. Nothing really stuck, save for *In the Meantime*, a big song from three years ago.

Could be the band will be doomed to one-hit wonderdom.