



ROD SANFORD

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At Breslin: Pearl Jam singer Eddie Vedder on-stage Tuesday.

Pearl Jam turns in a winning Breslin set

By Kathleen Lawey

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Pearl Jam's music is sometimes accused of being depressing, but the band's Tuesday show at MSU's Breslin Center was anything but.

From the opening notes of the band's first song, "Release," to the final encore surprise, band members were clearly enjoying themselves. So were the 13,000 or so fans in the audience at the sold-out show.

The stage dressing was elegantly simple — five huge Eiffel Tower-shaped candlesticks across the back of the stage and a round oriental rug in the front, with speakers hung above to provide maximum visibility. Mercifully, the disco ball suspended at the top of the stage came into use only once, during "Wishlist."

The band set a frantic pace for its 63-minute set with the first four songs, then slowed it down a little for "Dissident," the first of many songs that became audience singalongs.

The five-piece ensemble was tight, with songs crisply rendered and guitar solos evident, enjoyable but never overdone; singer Eddie Vedder was a dynamic focal point. When he wasn't playing guitar, Vedder used his microphone stand as a prop, pivoting it and cavorting with it. Vedder spoke little, in most cases letting the songs speak for themselves.

The biggest crowd pleasers were vintage songs from Pearl Jam's two earliest LPs, including "Jeremy," which brought full audience participation during its closing lament; "Even Flow," which included several stellar guitar moments.

At the beginning of the half-hour encore, Vedder leaned into the microphone and crooned the first line of the Carpenters' "we've only just began . . ." Again, the biggest cheers came for older stuff, including a strong rendition of "Alive."

The band closed the show with a rendition of the 1962 hit "Sojourn of Love," with an audience member plucked onto the stage to hold the lyric book for Vedder. His first choice was a guy wearing a University of Michigan T-shirt. When Vedder realized he was in Spartan territory, he sent him back with a "nice to meet you, you have to go back." He did, cheerfully — it was that kind of night.