

# Pearl Jam back -- at last

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"Are you ready for Eddie?" the guy behind me was loudly asking all his friends.

Judging by the standing ovation and deafening shrieks omitted by the crowd as Pearl Jam walked on to the stage at the sold-out Molson Centre last night, that was proof enough.

It's been five long years since Pearl Jam played the Verdun Auditorium on a hot summer's night.

Even singer Eddie Vedder admitted that it's been too long, before launching into Present Tense and letting 19,000 Montreal fans know that all that really counted was the here and now.

There's nothing fancy about Pearl Jam. They're just five regular-looking guys standing on a stark stage with five large candle-holders in front a video scene -- but boy can they play.

Guitarists Stone Gossard and Mike McCready churned out all the right licks as they alternated between break-neck power chords and softer riffs, while the black-clad Vedder performed vocal acrobatics as he warbled, whispered and screamed his emotionally driven lyrics.

Credit also goes to the superb rhythm section of bassist Jeff Ament and touring drummer Matt Cameron, formerly of Soundgarden.

With such talent it's easy to see why Pearl Jam has been able to establish itself as one the pre-eminent rock bands of the decade. It comes as no surprise to find them on the pantheon of rock greats alongside The Who, Led Zepelin and U2.

Though they opened on a quiet note with the tasty Sometimes, Pearl Jam immediately picked up the pace with an anguished Corduroy and a full onslaught of Animal.

All the songs off their classic first album Ten that we wanted to hear were delivered: Jeremy, Even Flow, Alive and even Black.

Plus, several recent ones off the outstanding new album Yield, including Given to Fly, Wishlist and Do the Evolution.

There was even a tip of the hat to Vedder's all-time favourite band, The Who, with Baba O'Riley being thrown into the encore.

The funniest moment came when



PHIL CARPENTER, GAZETTE

Eddie Vedder, lead vocalist of Pearl Jam, performs at a sell-out show at the Molson Centre last night. It was Pearl Jam's first Montreal show in five years.

Daughter segued into Pink Floyd's Another Brick in the Wall. As the song finished, Vedder threw in the line: "Mr. President, leave those kids alone."

After witnessing last night's concert, it is understandable why Pearl Jam has such a loyal following. The band delivered everything their fans wanted to hear and didn't disappoint.

The biggest letdown of the evening was opening act Cheap Trick. Boasting

all four original members -- guitarist Rick Nielsen, singer Robin Zander, bassist Tom Petersson and drummer Bun E. Carlos -- the band's set was at first hampered by lousy sound, then by their refusal to play any of their hits, like Surrender or Dream Police. The only one they did was Heaven Tonight.

It seemed Nielsen was more interested in changing his guitar every song than the music itself. Too bad.