

Tamer Pearl Jam outshined by opener Iggy Pop

Reprinted from last night's late editions.

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No one ever said Pearl Jam didn't have guts. Well, maybe Kurt Cobain did, but let's move on anyway: Pearl Jam was the band that in its prime cut the lifeline to the MTV publicity machine. Then, the group took on the Goliath, Ticketmaster.

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No one ever said they were that smart either. The Seattle band's latest act was to let Iggy Pop open for them. This time it backfired for sure, because Iggy proceeded to whip their flannel-wearin' butts all over the stage.

For young 'uns, Iggy Pop is no less than the godfather of punk (as opposed to Neil Young, godfather of grunge). When everyone else in the '60s was a peace-and-love hippie, Iggy was the spit-in-your-face Stooge. He is the primal essence of rock 'n' roll.

He came out Tuesday night at the Coca-Cola Star Lake Amphitheatre before a sellout crowd of 22,536 (half of them were still in the parking lot) with four long-haired, Spinal Tap-looking guys who bore no pretensions of playing power ballads or fancy chords.

At 51, Iggy is so skinny you can almost see through him, but he's still packing the raw power he had when he was 21. Like an animal, he threw his body into punk rock anthems like "I Wanna Be Your Dog" and "Search and Destroy."

He stopped only to dedicate "A Real Wild Child" to our president and make one sociological commentary: "There's nothing real in America anymore. There's no taste left in America."

Before the Stooge hit the stage, Eddie Vedder and his hat had slipped on alone and announced, "Good evening, I'm Iggy Pop," and begun the night with an impressive electric ballad, "Throw Your Arms Around Me."

It took Pearl Jam's set to establish that Eddie is no Iggy. P.J.'s last appearance in Pittsburgh was six



Bob Donaldson/Post-Gazette

Pearl Jam lead singer Eddie Vedder refrained from jumping off speaker cabinets this time out at Star Lake.

years ago at Lollapalooza II, at which time the band hit the stage like "unleashed lions," to paraphrase "Jeremy."

Everyone's six years older now, especially Vedder, who hasn't taken this fame thing very well at all.

Pearl Jam arrived with a droning "Release" on a plain stage equipped with five tall candles in the back, before lunging into "Brain of J." Where once Vedder jumped from speaker cabinets, now he has gone and pulled a Mick Jagger and

artists in Mike McCready and Stone Gossard, but rather than work the stage, he seems to want to cling to something safe.

The crowd responded enthusiastically — singing along and even raising their arms in a "V" — though the days of flying over the railings seem to be in the past. This was no Warped audience.

A few songs into the set, Vedder said, "All these years we haven't been able to get a gig in PA... we're going to try to make up for the years and play every song."

Indeed, Pearl Jam came to play — and play and play — stretching the set past two hours and hitting every song that fans could have wanted to hear. By now, the band has quite a collection, and, in their growing maturity, a lot of them are sludgy, moody, earnest and mid-tempo.

"Corduroy" and "I Got 'It" were early highlights, leading up to an energized pairing of "Even-Flow" and "Jeremy." For the most part, they were played by the numbers, with McCready reproducing the guitar lines with precision.

Vedder was a study in restraint, ready to burst, and at rare times doing so, like on the climax to "Rearview Mirror." Mostly he held back, and by the time they were closing the set with "Alive," the dude still had his shirt tucked in. Before he let the crowd head for the exits though, he treated them to gems like "Black," "Not for You" and "Rockin' in the Free World," a little thing he had done with Young.

Not many of those fans can say they didn't go home happy. But the one thing Pearl Jam didn't do Tuesday night at muddy Star Lake was search and destroy.

Now, the security guards, on the other hand... that's a whole other story.