

Rock 'n' roll's jewel



Pearl Jam fans believe their band stands above others

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It's been seven years since Pearl Jam released its debut album *Ten*, and just six years since the group last performed at the Blossom Music Center in a mud-covered Lollapalooza festival. However — at least in the realm of pop music — the entire world has changed.

Last night's sold-out show proved Pearl Jam is among the world's elite rock bands. The group has already managed to spawn a second generation of fans.

"I was in sixth grade when they played here in 1992. I wasn't even allowed to go to rock concerts at the time," said 17-year-old Marty Cizmar, a senior at Tallmadge High School. "Pearl Jam is not like Fastball or Marcy Playground or any of those other radio bands. They have staying power. There's something else there, besides just the music."

Cizmar and his classmate, Tim Tracy, have driven to two other shows on the current tour (in Toronto and Pittsburgh). They're examples of how the new class of Pearl Jam disciples see the group differently than it was perceived during the grunge explosion of the early '90s: To these kids, Pearl Jam is not the angst-ridden voice of alienated youth; Pearl Jam is an uplifting, feel-good band with insightful lyrics.

"I get a lot of feeling out of these shows," Tracy said. "It puts me in the right frame of mind. They're not an angry band at all."

Pearl Jam frontman Eddie Vedder certainly didn't seem angry; he was actually skateboarding (at least briefly) in the crowd hours before the show.

He still works hard at portraying himself as a Man of the People — and it seems to be working. Some of the reasons fans gave for admiring Vedder were weird, but they all pointed toward one general idea: Vedder may lead the decade's most successful rock band, but he's still just an average guy.

"He's pretty connected to the people," said John Kane, 17, of Lyndhurst. "He's like a normal person. I mean, when he stays in a hotel on tour, he goes swimming by himself. He doesn't bring security guards to the pool."

It was unclear how Kane knew about Vedder's swimming habits; however, that profession of knowledge wasn't unusual. Lots of people in the crowd of more than 18,000 people seemed to think they knew (or at least understood) a lot of peculiar and specific details about the group.

Fundamentally, it seemed like the one overriding cliché about Pearl Jam had not disappeared: Most of the band's fans do

LEW STAM/Houston Journal

Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder, performing yesterday at Blossom Music Center, is still a "regular guy," according to die-hard fans.

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not see them as rock stars.

It was almost as if the Pearl Jam faithful perceived the group as soldiers in a war against conventional pop music. When asked why they like the band, an amazingly high number of people mentioned the group's unsuccessful legal battle against Ticketmaster. (In the mid-'90s, Pearl Jam sued Ticketmaster in hopes of winning the right to hold concerts at major venues and control the ticket sales. The band contended Ticketmaster's surcharge was too high on the tickets it sold.)

Moreover, just about everybody complimented Pearl Jam by insulting other rock groups.

"Groups like Matchbox 20 are out there writing about nothing. Eddie is still making songs that matter," said Jeremiah McKenzie, 20, of Somerset, Ohio. "His music is more intelligent and more intense than the rest of the pack. Pearl Jam proves that you don't need press coverage and MTV to sell 18,000 tickets in 20 minutes."

McKenzie and his girlfriend both wore camouflage pants to the



LEW STAMP/Beacon Journal

Eddie Vedder (at microphone) and the rest of Pearl Jam perform yesterday at Blossom. Many of the group's fans see the band as soldiers in a war against conventional pop music.

show. Why? Grass stains. The Blossom lawn was still very damp from the week's heavy rains. Consequently, the Blossom administrative office fielded an onslaught of complaints from people who were not allowed to bring blankets

into the amphitheater.

According to the Blossom staff, limits placed on what could be brought into the arena were set by Pearl Jam's management. That was a concept some disgruntled fans simply couldn't buy.

"I just don't believe Pearl Jam wouldn't want their fans to have blankets," said one perturbed fellow. "They don't even like Ticketmaster."

Apparently a little integrity goes a long way.