



Eddie Vedder: a voice that gets under the skin.

STAFF PHOTO BY KEITH GREENE

CONCERT REVIEW: PEARL JAM

Tremendous, transcendent

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Some bands miss their moment. The members of Pearl Jam fled from theirs as if it were an oncoming train — which, when you consider the fate of some of their peers, it probably was.

Pearl Jam is by now the sole surviving alumnus of the Seattle grunge class of '92, though its ride has been

bumpy in recent years (most notably the band's feud with Ticketmaster). While the group sells about one-tenth as many records now as six years ago, Pearl Jam still has enough juice to sell out places like Walnut Creek.

Monday night, a frenzied mob packed the amphitheater for Pearl Jam's first Triangle performance since the 1992 Lollapalooza tour. The show was tremendous, two-dozen

songs in two hours with almost too many high points to count.

Mostly, the crowd seemed to be there to partake of the sacrament of Eddie Vedder's pain. Pearl Jam's front man is not a great vocal technician, generally singing in a yowl that can warble off-pitch. But his voice nevertheless gets under the skin, and he has a charisma that makes it difficult to

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pay much attention to anyone else onstage (even though his band mates all played quite capably).

Onstage, Vedder seems to go back and forth between embracing his audience's adulation and rejecting it. As the show opened, he was so dimly lighted that his image barely registered on the overhead video screens. Vedder, who appeared to be in a trancelike state for the first half-dozen songs, finally came out of his reverie at a very odd moment — mid-song during "Not For You," a "My Generation"-style anthem for the '90s. During the bridge, he visibly relaxed, smiled at the crowd and said, "Glad you could make it."

But just so things wouldn't get too chummy, Vedder later dismissed the audience's rabid cheering at the start of the encore. "Ah, you probably say

that for all the bands," he said. "You're the same bunch o' [expletives] who were cheering for Dave Matthews last night." That didn't stop anyone from chanting, "Ed-die! Ed-die!" just as people do at Van Halen shows.

As for the rest of Pearl Jam, new drummer Matt Cameron (who replaced Jack Irons for this tour) was most notable. Cameron used to play in Soundgarden, and his hammer-of-the-gods pounding nudged Pearl Jam close to Led Zeppelin territory. In fact, the show featured many of the time-honored condiments of Classic Rock — strobe lights, fog, a disco ball and some credible Townshend-esque leaps by guitarist Mike McCready.

Apart from a few draggy slower numbers, most everything was at least good, at least a dozen songs were truly great, and a handful approached transcendence. Songs from Pearl Jam's current album, "Yield" (Epic Records), accounted for the core of the set, including "Do the Evolution,"

"Faithfull," "Wishlist" and "Brain of J." Old favorites "Daughter" and "Better Man" held up well, as did that old grunge chestnut "Even Flow."

The show peaked with the closing pre-encore stretch of Pearl Jam's 1992 breakthrough hits "Jeremy" and "Alive," because the band played 'em both like they still mean something. A song about a disturbed child who lashes out with unexpected violence, "Jeremy" has always been plenty creepy. As Vedder howled "Jeremy" with his usual fervor, it was hard not to think of the song in terms of this year's wave of school shootings.

Then came "Alive," which was a triumph — a song about someone who discovers that everything he believed about himself was a lie, yet finds strength from it. Not unlike Pearl Jam itself.

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