

# Pearl Jam fans crazy for Vedder

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STAFF WRITER

**P**earl Jam fans were rewarded for their patience Tuesday night when Eddie Vedder and company returned to the Garden State for the first time in more than four years for a sold-out show at the Continental Airlines Arena.

From start to finish, Vedder and the band produced a solid show jam-packed with hits from all five Pearl Jam albums. The quality of the sound throughout the band's two-hour set was flawless.

Fans — mostly 20somethings chanting "Eddie, Eddie!" — were rowdy and spent much of the show dancing, singing and standing on chairs. There were a few minor fights in the crowd, but, with security tight, there was no moshing, crowd surfing or leaps onto the stage.

Fresh off the H.O.R.D.E. summer festival tour, slide guitar master Ben Harper and the Innocent Criminals opened the show with a tight set of funky original tunes, topped off by a hot cover of Jimi Hendrix's "Voodoo Child." Much of the audi-

ence had not yet taken its seats, but those in attendance seemed appreciative, if not familiar with Harper's efforts.

Performing before a stage backlit by giant tiki torches, Pearl Jam opened the show with a loud string of offerings including "Animal," "Oceans" and "Given to Fly," a tune from the latest album, "Yield."

"Daughter" was the first of a number of songs throughout the night that inspired the crowd to sing along to every word. Within the tune, Vedder gave a little nod to the area's most popular performer — Bruce Springsteen — with a sample of Tom Waits' "Jersey Girl," which Springsteen made famous.

The set alternated between upbeat radio tunes such as "Corduroy" and "Wish List" (performed with a giant twirling disco ball over the stage) and harder-edged rockers like "Even Flow." In an interesting trilogy, Pearl Jam performed "Nothingman," "Leatherman" and "Better Man" back-to-back.

"Black" — clearly an audience favorite — proved to be a highlight of the show, with Pearl Jam offering

some of the best guitar licks this side of Led Zeppelin.

The set ended with Vedder's characteristic growl on "Do the Evolution."

Returning to screaming fans, Pearl Jam offered an extended set of encores, including "Go," "Immortality" and "Porch."

A tender rendering of "Elderly Woman Behind the Counter in a Small Town" showcased the less aggressive aspects of Vedder's voice.

Pearl Jam wrapped things up with a sixth encore — the familiar, if lyrically incomprehensible "Yellow Ledbetter," featuring the percussive talents of Soundgarden's Matt Cameron.

In "Elderly Woman," Vedder sings "My God, it's been so long, never dreamed you'd return."

It took a while, but Pearl Jam fans are sure glad they did.

□ *Pearl Jam will perform two more sold-out shows at 8 p.m. tonight and tomorrow at Madison Square Garden, Seventh Avenue and 33rd Street, New York City. Ben Harper opens. Call (212) 465-MSG1.*