

PEARL JAM PLEASES CROWD, NOT THEMSELVES, AT MEADOWS

ROGER CATLIN; Courant Rock Critic

THE HARTFORD COURANT

Everybody in the audience was cheering the Pearl Jam sellout at the Meadows Music Theatre in **Hartford** Sunday, but how did it sound from the bandstand?

"It was pretty flat from the band's point of view," Pearl Jam guitarist Stone Gossard says the day after the show. "One night is always different from the next. And when you have a crap show one night, you're coming out swinging the next show."

That might have been good news for Great Woods, where the band was playing after Hartford. But the up-and-down nature of touring might have affected the Meadows show. "We were all still high from the New York show," Gossard says.

During a two-night stand at Madison Square Garden -- the band's first -- the first night was not so good. "It was marred by technical difficulties; we were out of tune," Gossard says. But the second night, "was something everybody felt was special."

It was the first night in four years that the band had played "Breath" live, succumbing to the demand of hundreds of fans who had been requesting it for several nights straight. The same fans showed up in Hartford with signs that said "Thank You" for playing it. So the band cranked it up that night too, and played it for the second time.

"Here's one we haven't played in a while -- but it sounded pretty good last night," said Eddie Vedder in introducing it.

There was no particular reason Pearl Jam hadn't been playing "Breath," the guitarist says.

"You just burn out on a song or suddenly for whatever reason it doesn't translate well. Certain songs don't translate well live," Gossard says. "And for Ed, it's a lyrical thing too. He really needs to feel the lyric to be into it. If he doesn't feel into it, it makes it difficult."

Something else the band has been throwing into the current tour is "Hard to Imagine," a Pearl Jam track of "Vs." vintage that hadn't been officially issued until now, as a part of the "Chicago Cab" soundtrack on Gossard's own Loosegroove Records.

It's among a number of other tracks selected especially for the film based on the play "Hellcab." New songs by Supergrass, Helmet's Page Hamilton and Fu Manchu appear on the album as work by other Loosegroove

recording artists the HiFi Killers and Gossard's own side project Brad.

The Pearl Jam ballad "Hard to Imagine" was not released on "Vs.," Gossard says because "we already covered our ballads on that album. So it went into the vaults, and when we started writing we were in a different headspace for the next two or three records."

Gossard hopes "Chicago Cab" will bring a higher profile for his label. "It's something I really have a passion for," he says.

The Hartford Pearl Jam show was criticized by fans on the Internet, by the way, for the way it was handled by local security and the scores of Hartford police on hand. Pepper spray could be smelled wafting through the lawn seats, in a repeat of the Pearl Jam show there two years ago, when police in riot-gear stormed and sprayed gate-jumpers from the lawn.

The set list for Pearl Jam's Hartford show was: "Corduroy," "Animal," "Hail Hail," "Given to Fly," "I Got . . .," "Go," "Dissident," "Tremor Christ," "Daughter," "Jeremy," "Even Flow," "Faithful," "MFC," "Spin the Black Circle," "Wishlist," "Do the Evolution" (encore) "Brain of J," "Breath," "Rearview Mirror," "Betterman," "Alive," "Porch."