

Pearl Jam

Constitution Hall

Washington, D.C.

September 19th, 1998

Right down the street from the White House, **Eddie Vedder** was probably the second most nervous man in town. Pearl Jam hadn't toured in a couple of years, and expectations were high for this Voters for Choice benefit in the tiny 3,700-seat Constitution Hall. But the band's unzipped gusto blew all doubts away – after an introduction from host Gloria Steinem, “>**Pearl Jam** simply grunged the house. The whole band seemed to be in high spirits; during “Alive,” Vedder grinned jovially and paced the stage with a tambourine full of condoms, tossing them to the crowd and rakishly tucking one into his own pocket.

Vedder strapped on a guitar for a beautifully fragile “Wishlist,” and as he sang the line about 15 million hands praying to the sky, the entire crowd lifted its arms, inspiring another one of his sheepish smiles. The affection between band and fans was electric, and the guitars just kept roiling until the climax, Arthur Alexander's R&B oldie “Soldier of Love.” Pearl Jam have grown flexible enough to do justice to their passion, and they've wisely muscled up their moral force instead of trying to embrace an au courant irony that has nothing to do with them. They also look better than ever, which really does matter when you're a rock star. As Vedder slipped off his natty suit jacket, the teenage girl in front of me screamed, “Take it all off!” He didn't, but he did sing “Daughter,” which made her even happier.