

LIVE REVIEW



Fan appeal: Pearl Jam.

Pearl Jam scores a KO with its fans

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

Pearl Jam drummer Dave Abbruzzese said in a 1992 interview that playing live shows with his band is like fighting Mike Tyson. If that's the case, Pearl Jam knocked out Detroit area audiences in the first round.

Performing two sold-out shows last weekend — March 19 at Detroit's Masonic Temple and March 20 at Ann Arbor's Crisler Arena — Pearl Jam reinforced their status as one of the top-selling acts in rock. Stripped-down stages adorned with only a few toys and burning candles didn't hinder the show a bit.

Tormented reluctant superstar/lead singer Eddie Vedder glowed through 2 1/2 hours of hits — and a cover of Neil Young's "Keep on Rockin' in the Free World" — in near perfection. (Like the 1992 Lollapalooza Festival, "Jeremy" was left off the set list.)

Bassist Jeff Ament, with a baby doll strapped to his back, jumped like a kangaroo around the stage as guitarist Stone Gossard kept his cool, bobbing his head in his trademark goose-like style. Mike McCready staked his claim on the left side of the stage, walling away on his guitar.

Unlike the Crisler Arena show, Vedder strapped on a guitar for most of Pearl Jam's Masonic set, complementing guitarists Gossard and McCready. In Ann Arbor and Detroit, bassist Ament traded his bass for a slim stand-up model during "Glorified G." and "Daughter" off their latest self-titled album.

Shortly after taking the Masonic Temple stage, Vedder mumbled what so far has to be the understatement of the year: "We're going to be here for awhile. We're going to play some songs. No big deal."

Proving that bands and audiences feed off each other's energy, the Masonic Temple crowd stayed primarily subdued due to a subtle request by Vedder and the abundance of security and police officers. The singer, unkemptly dressed in a dark T-shirt and jeans, stomped in small circles. He released some energy during "Leash," walking along the edges of boxes lining the stage, and swinging back and forth over the audience from rope ladders hanging from the lights.

At the end of the show, Vedder downplayed his role as teen idol, toying dimeter in the audience. Toasting the crowd, he advised them to enjoy their youth, let the past be the past, and look forward to the future.

Energy was no problem at the Crisler Arena show. Twenty fans crammed up against the stage barricade and began hooty surfing long before Vedder slowly approached the front of the stage, head down, smearing black cream around his eyes. Once he was finished he led the band into a rendition of "Jeremy." The stage looked like an elevated slam pit with Vedder, leading the group, thrashing around the stage and dragging his microphone stand along with him.

Even Vedder seemed somewhat surprised by the energy of the Crisler Arena crowd. He offered an explanation: "The other night we had a bomb scare. Last night some crazy people snuck backstage. Then tonight I heard a few people escaped from (a mental institution), and you can tell who they are by their yellow bracelets."

The main floor crowd, given yellow bracelets to wear, wasn't insulted the least bit.

Although the Ann Arbor show was plagued by unmarked parking and overwhelmed, poorly marked ushers, most fans weren't fazed. As the band tore through "Why Go Home" from their debut album "Ten," fans seemed to take the chorus to heart. Leaving early wasn't on their mind.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Street Scene next week:

- Christina Fuoco profiles the Detroit-based band Tick Wessel.
- John Monaghan takes a look at the alternative movie scene.

Us3: Hip-hop and all that jazz

■ If you listen closely, you'll again hear the jazz musings of Reuben Wilson, Big John Patton and Art Blakey on "Hand on the Torch." Such samples are turning up in Us3's new release.

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER



While Us3 producers Geoff Wilkinson and Mel Simpson were recording their debut "Hand on the Torch," they never thought about bringing their blend of jazz and hip-hop to the stage. But when their first live show turned into a near riot, they thought well, maybe there was a demand for it. "It was like one of the Beatles' gigs in the '60s," said Wilkinson via telephone from England about his mid-1993 show in Japan. "They actually pulled the (original) trumpet player (Gerard Presencer) off the stage. He was used to playing jazz in England, and he goes all the way to Japan and got pulled off the stage by screaming Japanese women."

"We started thinking that there could actually be a demand to do it live."

For that show, the band took six musicians with them. Since then the revolving band, which stopped at Detroit's Fox Theatre on Saturday, March 12, with UB40, has expanded to nine pieces. (Wilkinson and Simpson are the only two permanent members.) The musical force, which averages age 24, uses a few recordings (samples) live shows, but mainly the work of saxophonists Tony Coole and Ed Jones, trumpeter Dominick Glover, bassist Geoffrey Gascoyne, drummer Cheryl Alleyne, keyboardist Timothy Vine, and rappers Rahsaan Kelly, Robbie Powell and Tukka Yoot. Although their stripped-down show in Japan was successful, Wilkinson and Simpson decided they owed it to the audience to play most of the pieces live.

"We thought the audience deserved it, really. Jazz is a music that has to be experienced live, I think. We wanted to make it completely live in order to do justice to the music and not cheat people," Wilkinson said.

While researching what other jazz/hip-hop bands were doing, they discovered that the shows lacked improvisation, which links the two music genres. Using samples was stale, Wilkinson said. Improvisation is what stir up excitement.



"Would an audience rather see the two guys that produced the album on stage, or would they rather see really hot soloists? I know which one I'd choose," he said.

Education is key

When the Wilkinson and Simpson created Us3, their original intent was to educate the public on the merits of jazz. As its tool, the band uses samples from the Blue Note Records' archives whose rights

convinced, we could convince others."

Us3, whose lyrics are written by Yoot and fellow rappers Rahsaan Kelly and Robbie Powell, educates subtly. There is no preaching.

"Educate" is a horrible word when you involve it with music. We just kind of wanted to open the door and if people wanted to come through that door, it was there for them. I believe that young people have a real problem having access to jazz," Wilkinson said.

Radio and record company marketing specialists gear jazz toward an older audience, which alienates younger people, he said. Apparently, young people are paying attention to Us3. The video for the first single "Cantaloup (Flip Fantasia)" — sometimes affectionately known as the "bitty bitty bop" song — was included in MTV's trendy "Buzz Bin." Aside from that it has become a dance club hit. Many Us3 fans are unaware that they're learning something by Herbie Hancock other than "Rockit." The track uses excerpts from the musician's song "Cantaloupe Island."

"They don't know they're actually dancing to Herbie Hancock. We get sort of a perverse delight out of that as well. It's a bit subversive," he said with a laugh.

A fine sample

"Hand on the Torch," which refers to the passing on of the jazz tradition, surprisingly is the only Blue Note album that has sold more

than 500,000 copies. The legendary blues label's archives has included works by Reuben Wilson, Lou Donaldson, Big John Patton, Art Blakey, the Jazz Messengers, Thelonious Monk, Grant Green, Bobby Hutcherson, Horace Silver and Donald Byrd, all of whom are sampled on the record.

"At first I thought that was amazing, but then I thought 'It's a real shame,'" said Jones, who met Wilkinson at a "Jazz Rap Weekend" in England. "It's a real tragedy" that legendary artists haven't achieved that status, he added.

For rapper Yoot, it was a "dream come true." He sees it as repaying his idols for influencing him. In return, jazz purists have lauded the group's effort.

"We anticipated probably a lot more criticism from the jazz purists. In Japan the jazz purists seem to accept it straight away. Like in Japan, they think really seriously about jazz and they really took us to heart, which was phenomenal. I think even the purists that might not like what we're doing accept it. One of the things were trying to do is get younger people into jazz. Everyone understands that and accepts that."

Some have vehemently opposed what the duo is doing, however.

"The one thing that we have been accused of is tearing pages out of the (jazz) Bible. But our 'stock in trade' answer to that is if we're tearing pages out of the Bible, then we're sanctioned by God."



A howl: Howling Diablos Mike Hollis (from left), Johnny Evans, Vin E. and Martin Gross — play Sierra Station in Grosse Pointe Park April 23.

Spontaneity counts for Howling Diablos

BY MARK E. GALLO
STAFF WRITER

The Howling Diablos may not be who you think they are. In fact, they're hoping not. The element of surprise is one of the big components of their enormous local popularity.

Depending on what night of the week you see them, the time of night you walk in, where it's at and who's sitting in with the core group that night, you're as likely to see one of the most amazing blues bands in town as you are a screaming rock'n'roll or envelope-pushing free jazz band. Although they may begin the night with a straight-ahead Detroit blues groove, they'll just as likely end with the Johnny Evans affectionately calls a "nut out."

"Our shows are always real spontaneous," said founder and saxophonist Evans. "To the point where we'll play tunes and the band doesn't even know them. If you create that kind of space where magic and cool stuff can happen, a lot of time it will."

Evans and co-founder Martin Gross, both longtime local music veterans, have been working together for more than a decade, and the chemistry is almost tangible. Singer/songwriter/guitarist Gross is a veteran of the Progressive Blues Band, the Bop Cats, the Urbanations and Little Tino and the Hawaiians, who had the hottest single in Detroit in 1954 with "Crazy Bout Those Tigers."

See DIABLOS, 7A

IN CONCERT

(810) 589-3344

CHAINSAW KITTENS
The Shelter below St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. (rock)
(313) 961-MELT

Wednesday, March 30

RICHARD BONDRELL
The Ark, 637 1/2 S. Main St., Ann Arbor. (blues)
(313) 761-1451

BLUE-EYED SOUL
Studio Lounge, 6921 Wayne Road, Westland. (rock)
(313) 729-2540

TENSION SPLASH

With Tyrone's Powerwheel at Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. (313) 996-8555

MARY MCQUIRE AND RON ELLMAN
The Dursing Gals, 222 Sherman Drive, Royal Oak. (acoustic guitar and violin)
(810) 544-2887

Thursday, March 31

CROWDED HOUSE
With Sheryl Crow at State Theatre, 2115 Woodward Ave., Detroit. (pop)
(313) 961-5451

BRUCE "UTAH" PHILLIPS
The Ark, 637 1/2 S. Main St., Ann Arbor. (acoustic)
(313) 761-1451

HIGHER
With Blue Dog and Sometimes Why at 3-D, 1815 N. Main St., Royal Oak. (rock)
(810) 589-3344

LEMON JUICE
With Blue-Eyed Soul at Psychcheck's Lounge, 2932 Canfield at Jos. Campau, Hamtramck. (rock)
(313) 874-0909

BLACK MALL
With Whipped at Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. (rock)
(313) 996-8555

ALBUS WEXLEY
Ann's, 5756 Cass Ave., Detroit. (blues)
(810) 832-2355

"BLUES SUPERHERO"
Featuring Eddie Hecchi of the Black Crowes, Mimi Farris, Paul Randolph, Shae-Lee, Mark Pasman and special guest George

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