

JMC 92

Tripping out on a sure thing, Pearl Jam cooks up a special blend of rock'n'roll. LAUREN SPENCER performs a taste test.

All you can see is a pair of high-top Converse sneakers twitching back and forth on the floor. The sneakers are connected to a guy who's laid out on the stage flat on his back, his face obscured by this dude crouched over him. The man on top has his face nuzzled really close to the other guy's neck. It almost looks like he's licking his ear or something. The sneakers are going double-time, and eventually the guy on top gets off, apparently having accomplished his task. On his face, a look of satisfaction.

Too-sexy male bonding? Not quite. Just a personal message from Pearl Jam vocalist Eddie Vedder to an overzealous fan in London, whose determined stage-diving has caused several heads to get kicked down in the front. That kind of thing makes Vedder mad. So when the unthinking schlemiel hurls himself onstage for another go, Vedder takes it upon himself to explain the situation in a close-up and intimate way. After it's over, the red-faced fan disappears back into the 900-capacity sweat-drenched audience, and that's the last we see of him. Bassist Jeff Ament, guitarists Stone Gossard and Mike McCready, and drummer

like a watermelon during his athletic stage performance. "But he got his point across."

"Stage-diving doesn't bother me," adds Vedder. "It's just when there's one pair of boots that keeps getting someone in the head, that's a drag. I spent a lot of time in the Chili Peppers pit when we were touring with them. It's tough down there."

And getting tougher all the time: As of this writing, Pearl Jam's audience is multiplying

that story, but as Ament points out over a Dutch brunch in Groningen, Holland, "You feel responsible when it's your first time in the country. People want to at least hear our background. But the next time we come to these cities we'll still have the same story."

So what's the story? In 1985, Jeff Ament, a 22-year-old basketball fanatic from Havre, Montana, hooked up with fellow sports lover Stone Gossard and

we've got

Seattle locals Mark Arm and Steve Turner to form the grunge-forefather band Green River. Conceptual differences led to an inevitable split—Arm grabbed Turner to form Mudhoney, while Gossard and Ament met up with singer Andrew Wood to create Mother Love Bone. The story of Wood's overdose on the eve of Mother Love Bone's first major-label debut became legendary.

Enter 1991 and Temple of the Dog, a side project with Soundgarden's Chris Cornell and Matt Cameron to embrace the memory of Wood and bring home the fact that Stone and Ament are still very much into playing music. They're joined in the Temple by guitarist Mike

a

Dave Abbruzzese are pretty amused.

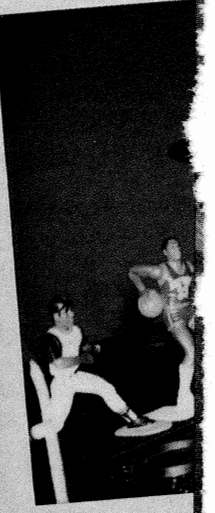
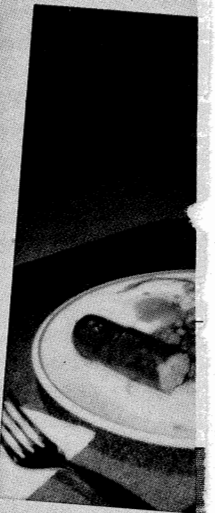
"I didn't know what was going on—if Eddie was making

out with the guy or what," says Ament with a laugh, after the show, removing the Ace bandages he wears on his right leg to protect it from swelling up

faster than bunnies. This European headlining tour was booked a bit prematurely—before the explosion of popularity the band has experienced since its release *Ten* hit the streets last year. There's a sort of manic panic in the air, causing the 400-to-900-capacity clubs to turn into giant sweaty, pulpy, moshing yucks.

It's all-consuming, this ravenous interest in a band that, seemingly new to the scene, is asked to spin the tale of its trip over and over again. The guys are getting a little sick of telling

feeling

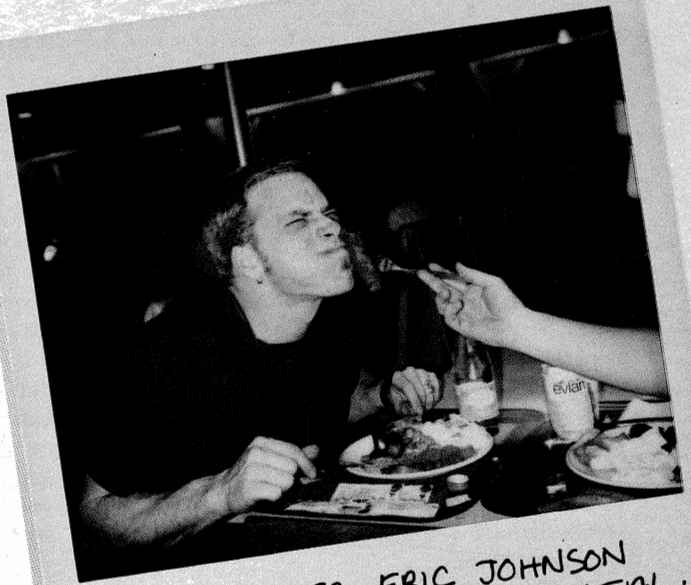




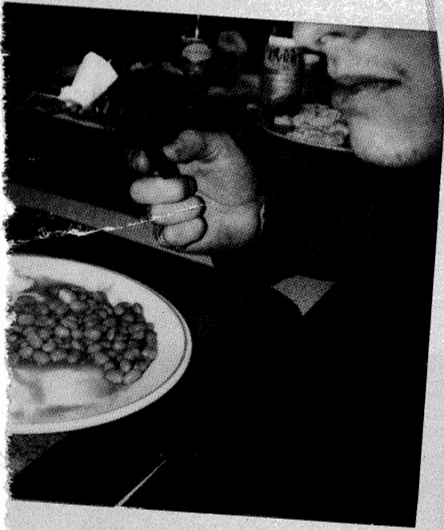
VERA CLUB IN GRONINGEN:
450 FANS WAVE HELLO
TO PEARL JAM.



Claudia Linda MONNE NANA
Jolanda
PEARL JAM-ETTES SIGN POLAROID.



ROAD MANAGER ERIC JOHNSON
IN SEARCH OF A DECENT MEAL.



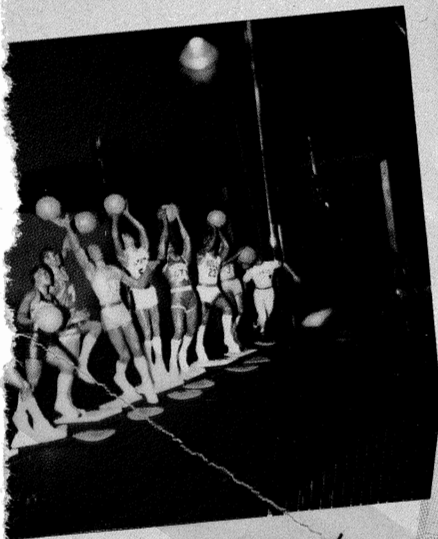
BE VERY AFRAID.



ME, STONE, ERIC, JEFF, EDDIE'S BRO
JASON, EPIC A+R GUY MICHAEL
GOLDSTONE, AND EDDIE.



APPROACHING THE MAINLAND,
DAVE ABBRUZZESE + ME.



A FEW OF JEFF'S
FAVORITE THINGS --
ONSTAGE INSPIRATION.



EDDIE PONDERES THE WONDERS OF
LINDA'S NEW TATTOO -- THE
PEARL JAM STICK FIGURE.



THE VERA CROWD GIVES
EDDIE REASON TO FLY.

...dy. That spring a Chicago-by-way-of-San-Diego young surf dude named Eddie Vedder received a tape of three instrumental pieces from Ament and Stone through ex-Red Hot Chili Pepper, current Eleven member Jack Irons, who'd declined the offer of the job of drummer but had suggested Vedder for vox duties. Vedder, who at the time was pumping gas at a local station, was blown away by the songs. While catching some early morning waves he wrote the lyrics in his head, went back to the shack he was living in, sang them into the tape recorder, and sent off the tape to the boys up north. It moved them, they called, and Vedder went. There's a rumor that the band's called Pearl Jam because Vedder's great grandmother, Pearl, made a hallucinogenic preserve—that would be jam—but no one has the recipe. Believe what you want—if nothing else it's a great story.

By the way, these guys are based in Seattle—a piece of American real estate that's gotten a hell of a lot of attention in the last year because of the noise pouring out of it. Even though millions of tons of rain fall on the Northwest yearly, the music there is anything but soggy. Escaping the wetness on this tour, the Pearl Jammers are finding that they don't really have much time to check out the terrain. As it is, they're being kept pretty busy telling that damn story for interviews.

"Next tour, I think things will be done a little differently. I'd just like to be able to enjoy the band and the city we're in," says Ament, helping the locals play spot-the-tourist by knocking over

a wine cooler in the restaurant.

Vedder ignores the clatter, and adds, "It's, like, if you do get any time to walk around the city, then that night onstage you feel like you're really playing to the people who live there."

So far most of the people they've made real contact with have been diving off their stage during shows. And it's gotten out of control.

"There was one club in Italy that was totally over the top," says Gossard. "People were balancing on speakers, just wobbling back and forth. What goes through your mind is 'Lets get this over with.'"

"The problem is that you can't concentrate on the music and just let go," says Vedder. "Which is why it's kind of a drag to have to stop people from stage-diving. But they just keep piling up and you can't let loose."

PEARL JAM FANS SEEM TO HAVE NO PROBLEM LOSING themselves in the music, resulting in a kind of cathartic abandon that has been missing from a lot of prefab shows these days. The instruments ebb and flow around a bluntly emotive set of vocal pipes that spew forth lyrics about child abuse, loss, and insanity. Amazingly, these musical tales



PEARL JAM AND THEIR EURO-VAN.
(FROM LEFT) STONE, EDDIE, JEFF,
DAVE, AND MIKE MCCREADY.

are not morbid drones, but instead, somehow hopeful messages. Ament has described it: "Eddie's lyrics take you to an open window, and just when you've got one foot out on the ledge, it's our job to bring you back in to celebrate."

The reality is that during shows, Vedder literally goes out on a ledge—and onto lighting fixtures, speaker platforms, and water pipes. Anything he

If silence is golden,
why is heavy metal
so popular?

can get his grip around becomes a jungle gym. This endeavor is, of course, contingent on a huge amount of trust for the audience below. If Vedder drops from a 30-foot light fixture near the ceiling, as he is wont to do, the waiting hands in the pit better break his fall. And although he's suffered his share of scrapes and bruises, Eddie hasn't been let down yet. Pure adrenal-junkie action. "I totally get an adrenaline rush when I'm doing that stuff," he confirms. "There was one time I was completely nauseous when I got back onstage."

Some people think he's insane or has a death wish. Or that it's just an act. But when Vedder gets that look in his eye, it's as if he's driven—he's out there and ain't no way he's coming back until all possibilities to push the envelope are played out. Another special something Vedder does has been dubbed "crowd surfing." The band jams hard onstage—Ament sprints back and forth as Gossard, McCready, and Abbruzzese groove on an unspoken wavelength. Then Vedder dives headfirst into the crowd and kind of swims on his stomach on the sea of hands as far back as the audience will take him. During New York's Roseland Ballroom show, he made it all the way to the rear wall, then was passed back to the stage. All with a little help from 3,500 of his friends.

It seems pure, but there are some critics of the band who've dismissed what they do as arena-rock staging, and there are still others who feel that what might be called the Seattle sound has been sullied by the rise of Pearl Jam's style of music into the mainstream (not to insult the reader's

intelligence by suggesting that all music coming from Seattle sounds the same).

Call it the N-factor, if you will, but there is no doubt that the world has finally made room for bands that as little as a year ago would have been relegated to alternative-college chart status. The universe is changing, and that's a very good thing. Pearl Jam has a gold record to show for it.

"I'm still waiting for that fax that tells us we're rock stars," says McCready, laughing.

"I think more than anything it caught us off guard," says Ament.

"It makes us really happy to find out that Soundgarden got their gold album too," adds Vedder. "It means that 500,000 people heard some really good songs. You could say that about ours as well."

"The weird thing is that now there are people who act like they can't believe we go out and walk around in public," says a baffled Gossard.

IN EUROPE, PEARL JAM'S FANS COME OUT OF THE woodwork, and a sure sign of their passion is the recurring appearance of the stick man. A little guy with outstretched arms and a big smile, he's the stick-figure logo that's become a sort of trademark for the band.

London's show is a teeming sweaty mass of people pressed against the stage. Road manager Eric Johnson is watching from the side as the security dudes pull people out of the pit hand over fist. One girl who's pulled out sits down in front of Vedder as he sings "Black" to her. It becomes

hard to tell if she's overcome by the heat or by the emotion, but when the show's over, she thanks him for giving the little stick man, who's painted on her shoe, a chance to see.

Then there's Linda, one of a group of five girls from Leiden, Holland, who's driven hours to Groningen to be at the sound check. When Pearl Jam comes over to say hi, she shows them her shoulder that has just gotten some fresh ink—a tattoo of the little stick dude. Vedder looks a bit freaked. "I feel kind of responsible when I see someone with that tattoo," he says. "Like, I have to live up to something they're gonna carry with them for their whole lives. It's a little scary."

But Ament adds, "They made the choice. It's weird for me since those are sketches I made a while ago as a sort of self-portrait and now they're on people's bodies."

That some fans are willing to scar themselves with a Pearl Jam logo is testimony that they feel a real connection to the band. Mostly because the band gives it right back to them. Particularly Vedder, who is most proud of his collection of Polaroids from each night's show. He snatches souls on film at the end of every set, and the crowd literally climbs all over each other to have them taken. The weirdest shots are the ones where the audience is steaming, the pictures come out ghostly from the moisture rising off the bodies, the faces shining in an almost hallucinogenic happy-trance.

Maybe Great Grandma Pearl's jam really exists after all.

And maybe these guys *do* have the recipe. ☺

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Lauren Spencer

• Senior Editor **Lauren Spencer** interviews Nirvana for our cover story (page 32). "They are one of the hottest bands on the planet now," she says. "Besides that, the band has mastered the fine art of drinking, Dramamine, alarm systems, and the correct use of backstage deli platters. We think that's a good thing." •



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