

Paul

WR 13100

Prof. Clauss

February 9, 2004

Note: I have changed this essay's margins and line spacing to save paper. Also, I numbered the paragraphs to facilitate discussion. --PClauss

(1) When I was thirteen years old, my brother asked me what I wanted for Christmas. I told him to get me some CD's, expecting Dave Mathew's Band, Nirvana, or some new trendy band at the time. On Christmas Eve I ripped open three CD's reading, *Ten*, *Vs.*, and *Vitalogy* on the cover. The albums were by a band named Pearl Jam. "Why Pearl Jam?" I thought to myself. I knew a couple of their songs, but why in the world did my brother waste away my gift on these CD's? However, after listening to these albums over and over again, I fell in love with the unique and powerful sound this band has exuded for almost 15 years. It was a sound that would continue to shape and influence a generation of music fans, as they would become the greatest band of the 90's.

(2) In August 1991 Pearl Jam released their debut album, *Ten*, launching themselves to the forefront of the alternative music scene. As a kid I listened to *Release*, the last song on this album, before falling asleep every night. Lying in bed I would listen to the deep, melodic voice of Ed Vedder describing the idealistic feelings of a generation with lyrics like "I see the world. Feel the truth," and "I'll ride the wave where it takes me." The album was a rock masterpiece, with eight of the eleven songs having radio play at some point. It took off in 1992, as hard rock fans became enthralled with the raw, pure sound combined with intense lyrics that spoke to a generation. The media labeled it "grunge music," but fans viewed it simply as great rock n' roll. Consequently, this album became synonymous with alternative music, and revolutionized the face of music for years to come.

(3) As a result of their immense popularity, Pearl Jam's next three albums soared as well, while the band's creativity thrived to new heights. As a freshman in high school, my then girlfriend got me a signed album of *Vs.* by lead singer Ed Vedder for my birthday. This was not only the coolest gift I had received in my young life, but more importantly represented the dedicated and crazed fan base their music had created. As a result, the band took a creative turn to explore and experiment with new artistic ways of music. *Vs.*, *Vitalogy*, and *No Code* all went 3x platinum within two years of their release, but reviews became more critical as Pearl Jam's music took a creative turn, distinctly different from their earlier albums. Songs like "Smile," "In My Tree," and "Around the Bend" were examples of a more mature band, a band focusing on new, creative music. "Smile" inspired me to pick up my first harmonica at the age of 15, as I learned the

riff to a song that would later become a fan favorite. Overall, as an ever-growing fan in 1998, I was excited about the originality they exuded in their new albums.

(4) Their fifth album, *Yield*, was loved by critics and reviewed to be their best work. The band wrote music based on what touched them at the time, rather than what the media or pop culture wanted to hear. Their fans loved the uniqueness and originality of the new album, and this unique sound inspired me to learn guitar. As a junior in high school I learned “Wish list,” a single from the album, and a song that reflected much of the ambition and idealism I was experiencing at the time. I listened to the album over and over, and “Wish list” became my new bedtime song. Record sales, however, did not reflect critics’ acclaim. *Yield* still sold millions of albums, but not nearly as many as previous albums. In part, this album reflected their growing desire to get out of the main stream where corporate businesses and the media dominates the music industry and the message that is often displayed.

(5) As a band, however, Pearl Jam was stronger than ever and their live performances reflected their ever-growing reputation as the best live show around. They set a new standard for what a live performance should be. Their tours were and still are the most exciting around, and the band’s high energy attracted all types of music lovers throughout the decade. Each show normally goes for two and a half to three hours, a tribute to the band’s endurance, musical variety, and love of their fans. They never play the same set of songs and often play completely different sets night in and night out, a tribute to their versatility and popularity of songs. Because of this versatility they have developed a dedicated fan base, which follows them from city to city, from show to show. For example, last year a friend of mine saw them 11 times on their North American tour. At one time he traveled from Cleveland, to Cincinnati, to Pittsburgh, and finally to Boston. Overall, he spent over a thousand dollars on Pearl Jam tickets and merchandise.

(6) In contrast to my friend’s numerous shows, my very first Pearl Jam show came in 2003 in Lexington, KY. My crazed friend was able to get me a floor seat, eighth row, looking straight at the microphone. For a longtime fan, this was a dream come true and I swear Ed Vedder looked at me repeatedly throughout the concert. The venue was packed as always, and the band played for two and a half hours of pure energy, emotion, and raw excitement. After seeing them for the first time, I know how addicting their shows can be and understand my friend’s obsession.

(7) To reward their fan loyalty, Pearl Jam has continuously fought for their fans, most notably in the ticket industry. They helped revolutionize the touring industry, and in 1994 the band filed its first lawsuit against ticket giant “Ticketmaster,” in hope of reducing ticket prices to be accessible to all people. Their hope was to keep ticket prices under \$20. The band claimed

that “Ticketmaster” was a monopoly, and refused to be puppets to a corporate giant. Consequently, fans of all ages grew to respect the band’s love of their fans. My dad, after being forced to listen to Pearl Jam on long road trips, has grown to respect and like their style of music. Moreover, he respects the band because they fight for their fans and respect the generations of artists that have paved the way for them.

(8) Not only does Pearl Jam’s music reflect the influence of rock legends, but they themselves have influenced a new generation of artists. In 1996 they collaborated on an album with rock legend Neil Young, who has played and shown his appreciation for the band over the years. Besides Neil Young, the band was influenced by the likes of The Who, Jimi Hendrix, The Ramones, The Clash, and Bruce Springsteen. Fans love hearing Pearl Jam cover numerous songs from these artists in concert, and the artists themselves have expressed their admiration for the band and their influence in the music world. In fact, Pearl Jam has collaborated with Springsteen numerous times, most recently in 2003 at the United Center in Chicago.

(9) New artists like Ben Harper and Jack Johnson realize the impact this band has had on shaping the face of music. Jack Johnson made numerous guest appearances on their 2003 tour, a compliment to the addictive energy the band exudes. At night one of Pearl Jam’s Madison Square Garden show, Ben Harper made a guest appearance and played two songs with the band. Displaying a big smile he said, “This is the greatest band in the world.” He cites Pearl Jam and front man Ed Vedder as a great influence on his musical roots, and is a fine example of how Pearl Jam’s music will influence new generations to come.

(10) The band’s influence in the 90’s is incomparable and their current influence on new fans is stronger than ever. I saw Pearl Jam three times last year. The second show was in Champaign, IL, and I took my girlfriend along to share the experience. She knew the popular songs from me listening to them, and had a favorite from their new album called “Thumbing My Way.” This song is mellower, with a great acoustic sound, and carries a strong emotional meaning behind it. Her one wish for the night was to hear this song. About halfway through the set Ed Vedder strummed that first D-Chord and Katie grasped my hand in excitement. Looking over at her halfway through the song I saw tears in her eyes. Later, she said she couldn’t believe she cried.

(11) This event demonstrates the impact Pearl Jam continues to have on new fans and why they have been the greatest band for over a decade. Certainly their energy is incomparable, and their endurance and versatility throughout the decade is unmatched. But perhaps most importantly, they have exuded an influence that shaped and will continue to shape generations of music fans and artists to come.