

Letterman

third third time's the charm

TEXT: Jonathan Cohen • PHOTOS: Brian



Sometimes the rush of being in close proximity to Pearl Jam is just overwhelming. And sometimes, in the excitement, you can't even fully remember what your eyes have just seen. Such was the case as I ran with joy out the door of the Ed Sullivan Theater after a taping of *The Late Show With David Letterman* on April 12, having just watched Pearl Jam make its first public appearance since the Bridge School, and debuting a brand new song. Luckily, I knew I would have a videotape of the performance to remind me of what my mind had temporarily scrambled.

Having secured tickets to the taping via an inordinate amount of string pulling, I made sure I was at the theater plenty early. I wound up about tenth in the line, and as we were escorted in the lobby of the building, the familiar bellow of one Eddie Vedder was audible. The band was soundchecking! And even though the theater doors were closed, I could still hear the muffled music coming from behind. They played four songs, including what later turned out to be "Grievance" twice. I still am not sure what the other two songs were. I couldn't believe my ears, and watched as a few fans pleaded with the usher to just open the doors a crack so all could hear. No dice. There had been rumors of a possible secret show while the band was in town for Letterman, press and photo shoots for *Binaural*, and my suspicions were tweaked as I spotted Eddie's wife Beth and her Hovercraft bandmate, guitarist Ryan, standing in line behind me. I figured they would know if anything was up, but the question was: would they tell little old me?

Finally we were led into the theater, and I staked out a prime seat right in the middle of the balcony's first row. The show just happened to be in celebration of Letterman's 53rd birthday, and first guest Paul Newman presented Dave with a rather peculiar gift: a blue dress. It was tough to contain my excitement as the interview with Newman dragged on into a second segment, but the Late Show band kept things interesting by jamming out on a pretty solid rendition of "Hail Hail" during the first commercial break. The evening's top ten list also gave PJ a nod. Number four of Dave's "Top Ten Signs I'm Getting Old" was "Told Pearl Jam I was gonna call the cops if they played too loud."

All the while, I was hoping -- as much as I love "Nothing As It Seems" -- that the band would choose another song to play. But I figured that since "NAIS" was the first single from *Binaural*, it would be a logical choice. I should have realized that "logical choice" is not always a part of the Pearl Jam vocabulary.

With only about 15 minutes left in the show, all the other sketches were complete, and Pearl Jam's crew appeared to set up their gear. Only a couple of minutes before they were set to go, the band strolled out onto the set, as the crowd roared in anticipation. Eddie was decked out in what looked to be a jogging suit covered by a hooded sweatshirt, while Stone bore the usual just-got-out-of-bed look as he assumed his place to Eddie's left.

In a flash, Letterman returned from a commercial holding a cardboard flat of the *Binaural* album cover. He said he looks for any excuse to have the band perform, and with that, Matt Cameron launched into a powerful drum beat, as I nearly jumped out

LEFT: Matt says hi to the Pearl Jam (and Soundgarden, I'm sure) fans gathered outside the *Letterman* stage door. BELOW: three freeze-frames of PJ in action that night on *Letterman*.



Mach Three

when Pearl Jam revisits Dave.

Mistretta • SCREEN SHOTS: Gabe Man



of my seat in excitement. The song was underway, with Ed's lyrics tough to make out, but the band in fine, tight form, rocking through a song whose punky riffs and pop-tinged choruses initially reminded me of "Whipping" or even "Habit." "Pledge my grievance to the flag," he sang, confirming that the track was indeed "Grievance." In three short minutes it was done, highlighted by a heavy and relentless final section. Afterward, Mike — who'd been hurtling himself around the stage with abandon during the song — inexplicably threw his guitar the ground, as Ed looked over quizzically. Letterman strolled over to say thank you and shake hands, and Ed presented him with the smashed guitar as a birthday present certainly more suitable than Paul Newman's blue dress. With that, it was over. I managed to corner Ryan from Hovercraft, who informed me that no special show was in the works. Ultimately, I didn't care, as I proceeded to run 10 blocks back to my office in Times Square, eager to chat with fellow PJ fanatics about what had gone down during another extremely special couple of hours spent in the company of Seattle's finest. ☘

TOP: Mr. Mike "Cool" McCready enters the Ed Sullivan Theater. ABOVE: two more quick-takes of the band rocking *Letterman*. ABOVE RIGHT: PJ meets Dave. RIGHT: Dave, with his fake *Binaural* vinyl, introducing Pearl Jam. BELOW: A bemused Stone and Jeff get their backpacks in order as they brave the crowd to go into the sound stage.



A QUICK HISTORY OF PEARL JAM ON *LETTERMAN*
 ① FEBRUARY 27, 1996: ED SINGS A SNIPPET FROM "BLACK" UNANNOUNCED. ② SEPTEMBER 20, 1996: THE WHOLE BAND PROPER PLAYS *NO CODE*'S "HAIL HAIL." ③ MAY 1, 1998: MATT CAMERON MAKES HIS PJ DEBUT AS THEY PLAY *YIELD*'S "WISHLIST." ④ JULY 28, 1999: PETE TOWNSHEND AND ED SING "HEART TO HANG ONTO" AND "MAGIC BUS." ⑤ APRIL 12, 2000: PJ RETURNS TO DEBUT *BINAURAL*'S "GRIEVANCE."

