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Too Cubed on Phish and Pearl Jam Tour

Stan was curious to see what both Pearl Jam and Phish were doing. He asked Zack to pull strings so they could see some shows where the two bands' tours intersected. On July 13 and 14, Pearl Jam would play in Los Angeles. On the 16th, that band would play in Sacramento. On the 19th, Phish would be in the San Francisco area, then move on to Ventura on the 20th. The Eight, plus Margaret, Ned and Lisa, Zack and Sean, chartered a plane to fly from Hartford to Los Angeles and drive north then back south in two deluxe stretch limos. A group retreat, doing competitive research.

The first Pearl Jam show blew them away. A seventeen-song set, followed by a four song mini-set, then a single encore. Song selection seemed at times incongruous, like putting "Wishlist" in between "Even Flow" and "Jeremy." Maybe it was just those insufferable equipment changes. They were impressed with the jamming out and sampling in two of the songs in the mini-set, "Better Man" and "Daughter." Then came a potent "Alive," a brief pause, then "Baba O'Riley." The boys were happy.

The next night wasn't quite as much fun. They repeated eleven of the twenty-two songs they played the night before. It seemed like the band was angry with the venue. The encore mini-set went: "Do the Evolution, Rearviewmirror, Wishlist, Leaving Here." They tagged on a

tune that nobody recognized at first, then deduced that it could only be a Ramones cover: “The KKK Took My Baby Away.” Somewhat odd. It was the only time Pearl Jam ever played that song.

Up in Sacramento, it was pretty much the same story. The band repeated the same eleven songs from the first two nights, although each night the order was shuffled slightly (If you care, those were: “Corduroy,” Hail, Hail,” “Brain of J,” “Even Flow” (of course!), “Wishlist,” “Jeremy,” “Do The Evolution,” “Rearviewmirror,” “Better Man,” “Daughter” and “Alive”). They also played one extra song that night, five in the mini-set instead of four. The members of Too Cubed argued as to which of the principal closers was strongest: “Alive,” “Go” or “Porch.” They all agreed that “Rearviewmirror” could be a closer. *All* those songs kicked ass.

While the Pearl Jam shows were heavy and brooding, the Phish shows sparkled with energy and humor. The first night at Shoreline they were a little hokey, but the “You Enjoy Myself” to close the first set was an eye opener. The second set wasn’t particularly impressive that night. “Llama” was a promising opener, “Wolfman’s Brother > Piper” didn’t do much. Phish put it into high gear and rocketed through the rest of the set.

The second night brought them to the lovely Ventura County Fairgrounds. This time the first set started with promise, then floundered. The boys in Too Cubed did not trip this night, so maybe the “Split Open and Melt” would have been more interesting . . . or scary. The second set once again brought out the best. The second to last song, “Prince Caspian,” was an unimpressive number in general, but for some reason on this night Anastasio just went off on it, spewing staccato thirty-second notes like machine gunfire. Maybe he heard Trip was in the audience.

The boys in Too Cubed raised their eyebrows. The perennial favorite “Harry Hood” closed. The encore brought a comedy number with Fishman singing “Sexual Healing” from cue cards and then an especially strong “Halley’s Comet” to round it out.

Phish’s lights blew everyone away. Lou was particularly impressed with the timing, but everybody noticed it. There was also glowstick tossing, plus a cool parking lot scene, with plenty of vending and hanging out. Too Cubed did venture out and about but then had to go hide again as soon as they were recognized. But it was a nice scene, similar to their own.

By contrast, the crowds in the lots for Pearl Jam’s shows were total amateurs. Their only preparation was getting the biggest cooler available at a chain store and filling it with cans of domestic beer and just enough ice. Like all they knew was tailgating before a sports game. Too Cubed and Phish’s fans almost all seemed to have collapsing chairs, separate coolers for food and beer, and some basic camping equipment. Many also had shade tents, camp stoves, lanterns, musical instruments, plus *cool* sports equipment like bikes, flying discs, footbags, devil sticks, roller skates, skateboards and roller boards. Often there were Bongs on Board or Bars on Board, or both. The ambitious brought kegs of beer. Everything you need to make passing time waiting in a parking lot a fun and social event. If you forgot something, you could buy it on Shakedown Street, plus doses, bags of weed and nitrous. No such neighborhood on Pearl Jam tour. Amateurs.