

**For Immediate Release**

## **Jello Biafra and Other Artists Bring In Over \$6K for Wrongfully-Convicted Trio**

*Last month's West Memphis Three Awareness Day event raised both funds and awareness*

August xx, 2005: San Francisco, Calif.—On July 23, 2005, Jello Biafra and other artists came together at The Swedish American Music Hall (2170 Market Street) for a night of acoustic music designed to raise money for the defense fund of Damien Echols, Jessie Misskelley, Jr., and Jason Baldwin. The three Arkansas men, dubbed the West Memphis Three, were convicted of the 1993 murders of three elementary school children. Since their trials were chronicled by Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky in the HBO documentary *Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills*, a groundswell of support has formed around the Echols, Misskelley, and Baldwin—support that includes a wide array of artists such as Metallica, Henry Rollins, Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder, Tom Waits, Winona Ryder, *South Park* creator Trey Parker, and Art Alexakis of Everclear.

### ***Artists Speak Out***

Jello Biafra, former lead singer of the Dead Kennedys, made a statement at the event condemning the evidence that convicted the West Memphis Three, as well as the system that allowed it to happen.

“Some people say to me, what are you doing defending these guys in Arkansas? They're a bunch of stoners who chopped up little kids for Satan and stuff! And I say, well, okay I wasn't there, I'm not 100 percent sure the West Memphis Three are innocent, but even so, isn't there something in the Constitution about people have to be guilty beyond a reasonable doubt?” said Biafra. “If they're guilty, prove it this time. Prove it for real. No matter how law and order you are, wouldn't it be better to catch the right person before it happens to another kid?”

Biafra is no stranger to political activism: In 1986, the Dead Kennedys were forced to defend their right to free speech against obscenity charges and since the band split, he has used his spoken word material to espouse his political views.

A staunch opponent of the death penalty, Biafra added, “I have been militantly, vehemently against the death penalty for one simple reason: What if they've got the wrong person? This could happen to me; what if they've got the wrong person?”

Other artists that performed at the event expressed similar sentiments. Laurie Hall of Knife and Fork said that when the band was booked to perform at the event, she wasn't aware of the case, but after renting the movies, she was “shocked and amazed and mortified” by that she learned. “I'm very happy to be doing this much to raise the awareness because mine was raised,” said Hall.

Kelley Stoltz also saw the *Paradise Lost* documentaries and felt moved to act: “I had just seen the movies and learned a bit about the case through those and through their Web site and I’m not convinced that any of those guys are guilty. It’s pretty obvious to me that justice is not being served. I’m just here to raise some money by doing whatever I can,” he said.

### ***Future Fundraising***

Damien Echols, Jessie Misskelley, and Jason Baldwin—all teenagers at the time—were convicted in 1994 for the brutal murders of three eight-year-old boys (Stevie Branch, Michael Moore, and Christopher Byers) in West Memphis, Ark. Despite flimsy circumstantial evidence, the bulk of which centered on the trio’s alleged involvement in a Satanic cult, and a questionable and factually-inaccurate confession extracted from mentally-challenged Misskelley, the three have been serving stiff prison sentences for over a decade. Misskelley was sentenced to life plus 40 years, Baldwin is serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole, and Echols—who was deemed the ringleader of the attacks thanks to his love of black clothing and Metallica—is currently on death row as he waits for the outcome of his appeals.

Event organizer Anje Vela, president of Vela Entertainment, said she is pleased by the its success and is in the midst of planning a fundraising effort for next year’s West Memphis Three Awareness Day.

“I am happy to say that we will be donating over \$6,000 from this sold-out show to the defense fund of death row victim Damien Echols. We had avid supporters in the room and folks who didn’t know why they were there, other than to hear one of their favorite talents. It was definitely a night of raising funds and awareness for the West Memphis Three.” said Vela. “I hope to see Damien, Jessie and Jason exonerated from being held down for nothing more than their choice of clothing, reading materials or association of friendships.”

For information on West Memphis Three Awareness Day 2006, or to volunteer, please contact Anje Vela at (415) 948-8391.