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News



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Posted on Thu, Feb. 06, 2003

Ex-punker, activist Jello Biafra coming to CSUMB

'Now it is 1984' topic of speech

By ELISABETH NADIN
Herald Correspondent

Punk rocker-turned-politician Jello Biafra, formerly of the Dead Kennedys, is bringing his political message to campuses nationwide, starting with CSU-Monterey Bay.

Following his own advice of "Don't hate the media, become the media," the singer, songwriter and one-time presidential candidate, 44, will speak to CSUMB students on Wednesday about U.S. foreign policy, terrorism and the war on Iraq.

The upcoming speech, titled "Now it is 1984," was organized by the events committee of Student Voice, the CSUMB student government.

"Jello appeals to a younger crowd than the average lecturer," said Vito Triglia, events workgroup chairman for Student Voice.

"He focuses on freedom of speech, rights and privileges, and he connects that to the political climate," said Triglia, a social behavioral sciences and music student and longtime fan of the Dead Kennedys.

The Dead Kennedys, a hardcore punk rock band whose songs tackled political themes, formed in San Francisco in 1978. Their first single, "California 'ber Alles," attacked then-Governor Jerry Brown. The band broke up in 1986, but recently started touring again, sans Biafra.

Biafra, whose political microphone was once restricted to musical performances in the 1970s and 1980s, began talking politics in 1986 when a Dead Kennedys album was brought to trial on obscenity charges. An unlikely politician, he ran for mayor of San Francisco in 1979 and was even a Green Party presidential nominee in 2000.

Triglia hopes Biafra's CSUMB speech will spark further political discussion on campus.

"The whole idea behind this is to get people who aren't interested more interested, to expand social and political awareness on campus," he said.

Triglia said when Biafra spoke in the crowded CSUMB student cafe four years ago, people lined up around the building and stood under the windows to hear him.

"He's a very popular speaker on college campuses in the region, if not the nation," said Holly White, spokeswoman for CSUMB. She said the school is expecting 300 to 500 people.

"He's willing to say the outrageous," said White. "Whether that's good or bad, it gets discussion going."

Biafra likened U.S. action in Iraq to terrorism during a speech at the University of Pittsburgh last October. He also challenged what he called an "escalating orgy of feel-good violence" between Bush and terrorists.

The CSUMB talk kickstarts Biafra's promotional tour of a new spoken word album on hot political topics like the Sept. 11 attacks and President Bush. After his Feb. 12 Monterey visit, Biafra will continue his campus tour at the University of Oregon in Eugene.



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