

UC SANTA BARBARA

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UC SANTA BARBARA SCHOLAR TO 'ROCK OUT' AT NATIONAL SOCIOLOGY CONFERENCE

UC Santa Barbara sociologist William Bielby will be giving the term "multimedia presentation" a new twist when he talks about his research at the annual American Sociological Association meeting in Chicago August 16-19.

Bielby, who is the national organization's newly elected president, will not only discuss his current work on pre-garage bands of the late-1950s and early-1960s, but will perform with a band of his own, called "Thin Vitae," for the conference attendees.

"I'm interested in the guys who started the first guitar bands in the post-Elvis, pre-surf/pre-Beatles era," Bielby said.

"Basically, I'm interested in how music became part of the lives of aspiring musicians who were -- at most -- ALMOST famous."

Bielby's scholarly interest is also a personal one.

In 1961, he and several of his buddies formed a group called "The Trebles" while still junior high school students in the south suburbs of Chicago.

Their gigs -- parties, high school dances, and even a few weddings -- were always close to home, as the band members were too young to drive themselves.

"We were sort of a novelty back then, because we were only 13 to 15 years old," Bielby said.

The group continued to play in their high school years, adding band members, and changing their name to "The Newports." Until their junior year (1963), the group was one of the few high school rock bands in the south suburbs of Chicago.

Then, "the Beatles changed all that, and in a matter of months we had plenty of competition," Bielby said.

The Newports recorded just once, as a backup band for a middle-aged man in the neighborhood who "fancied himself a country and western singer," Bielby said.

"We must have been quite a sight -- a balding country crooner backed up by 14 year olds."

Even when studying for his doctorate in sociology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Bielby found time to play his guitar with a group, made up of fellow graduate students.

"We had a grad student band that was pretty good," he said.

"We changed our name for nearly every gig, but the name that finally stuck was Anonymous Bosch."

It is with two members of his old grad school band, one of whom is now a professor at Harvard, plus a couple of other sociologists from UC Santa Barbara, and a professor at Vassar, and one of the original members of "The Newports" that Bielby will perform at the conference (Friday, August 16 at 9:30 p.m. in the Grand Ballroom at the Hilton Chicago).

Bielby's new research focus is a labor of love as well as a scholarly endeavor.

"This is totally different from anything else I have done as a sociologist," he said.

"I'm known mainly for statistical studies with lots of numbers, tables, and graphs.

But the nice thing about being a sociologist is that you can reinvent yourself and your scholarly interests whenever the spirit moves you."

In addition to his performance, Bielby will also deliver two papers on other research.

In all, 13 UC Santa Barbara sociologists, 25 graduate students, and 11 undergraduate students will present papers at the national conference.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.