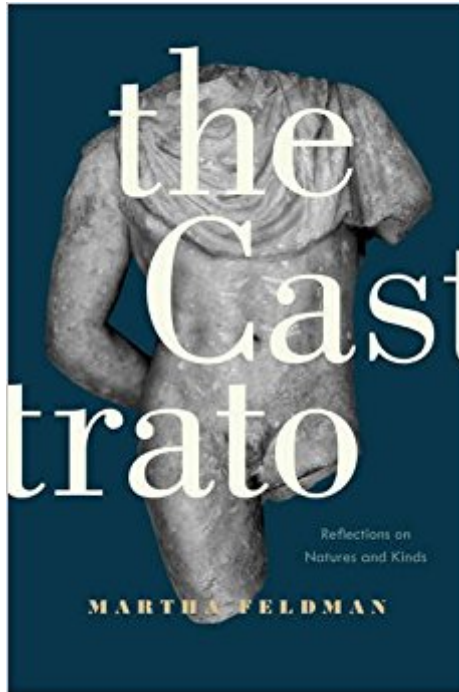


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# The Castrato: Reflections On Natures And Kinds (Ernest Bloch Lectures)



## Synopsis

The *Castrato* is a nuanced exploration of why innumerable boys were castrated for singing between the mid-sixteenth and late-nineteenth centuries. It shows that the entire foundation of Western classical singing, culminating in bel canto, was birthed from an unlikely and historically unique set of desires, public and private, aesthetic, economic, and political. In Italy, castration for singing was understood through the lens of Catholic blood sacrifice as expressed in idioms of offering and renunciation and, paradoxically, in satire, verbal abuse, and even the symbolism of the castrato's comic cousin Pulcinella. Sacrifice in turn was inseparable from the system of patriarchy—involving teachers, patrons, colleagues, and relatives—whereby castrated males were produced not as nonmen, as often thought nowadays, but as idealized males. Yet what captivated audiences and composers—from Cavalli and Pergolesi to Handel, Mozart, and Rossini—were the extraordinary capacities of castrato voices, a phenomenon ultimately unsettled by Enlightenment morality. Although the castrati failed to survive, their musicality and vocality have persisted long past their literal demise.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

this is Professor Martha Feldman's third BIG book and the most readable for audiences who are not scholars. it is delightful and complete! with chapters on everything from the societal origins and ramifications of castration, to explanations of what castration does to the mature castrato's vocal

cords, to examples and explanations of the specific music written for and sung by these angels. this is everything you want to know about the Castrato from the definitive source. and, it's fun reading. Any and every book by Martha Feldman lifts the bar on the field of musicology and this is that.

An extraordinary and thoroughly engrossing study of the castrato in his heyday from the late 16th to the early 19th centuries, challenging but worth the effort for those -- not just fellow scholars -- interested in music history, theater history, gender and sexuality studies and general European social history, including religion. Feldman covers a wide swath of material, but at the same time presents us many individual case histories that give the historical situation real life. The beginning sections seem a bit heavy on academic lingo, but thereafter Feldman writes with a lively pen and deeply humane understanding. This is a tour de force, an example of great musical scholarship and historical narrative.

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