

Distinguished Lecture Series presents

Martha Feldman

Tuesday, May 23, 2017 – 4 p.m.

Conrad Prebys Music Center
Recital Hall

Free admission



The UC San Diego Department of Music's
Distinguished Lecture Series presents
Martha Feldman

The Castrato Phantom: Moreschi, Fellini, and the Sacred Vernacular in Rome

“This paper explores what I call the ‘sacred vernacular’ to puzzle out the conditions in twentieth-century Rome that mark the uncomfortable anomaly of the castrato, the last of whom, Alessandro Moreschi, died there in 1922. The term sacred vernacular refers to the peculiarly Italian and especially Roman tendency to domesticate the sacred by means of the everyday. Among the consequences of this cultural formation is the figure of the sacred monster, which arguably persists throughout the twentieth century. Although the castrato is a marked instance of it, Moreschi’s death, coincident with the rise of fascism, initiates a decades-long period of masculinist tropes and obliteration of historical memory of the castrato. Only with the emergence of post-realist cinema of mid-century Rome—especially that of the century’s most iconic and spectacular elaborator of the sacred vernacular, Federico Fellini, whose films teem with boundary figures and domesticated references to the sacred—does some nascent attention to the Roman burden of the castrato reemerge. Now enmeshed in jokes and parody, the castrato becomes a desirable voice imprisoned in a deficient body while nevertheless mediating between worlds sacred and everyday.”

– Martha Feldman