

**Biagio Rebecca Draws the London Opera House:  
London's Kings Theatre in the 1790s**

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London's Italian Opera House, The King's Theatre, had a rather chequered history as far as its administration is concerned, a history that involved mismanagement, financial failure, and arson.<sup>1</sup> Such a history may partly account for the fact that, for a building with such a public face, very little illustrative or even descriptive material has survived. In particular, there is considerable uncertainty concerning aspects of the building and its interior as it was developed and altered between 1790 and 1796. The two magnificent drawings in the Royal Collection attributed to Biagio Rebecca (1731–1808) are therefore of particular interest, given that they are both highly detailed and very atmospheric (Figs. 1, 5). The drawings are not unknown: they were catalogued and published by A. P. Oppé in 1950,<sup>2</sup> and that of the auditorium has been reproduced by Gillian D'Arcy Wood.<sup>3</sup> However, they have not been further discussed as works of Rebecca, nor – and perhaps more importantly here – have they been considered at all in the context of other materials on the building. Nor have they been dated, Oppé simply noting that the auditorium shown is quite unlike that in Robert Wilkinson's 1818 *Londina Illustrata*, and suggesting that they perhaps represented a post-1787 scheme that was not carried out,<sup>4</sup> while Wood dates the auditorium illustration to 'c 1792', a date possibly correct for the drawing but improbable for the building. The drawings are probably those purchased from Colnaghi and Co by George IV when Prince of Wales. The invoice, dated 9 July 1804, shows that the then Prince paid £7 7s for 'A Drawing of the Inside of the Opera House', and £8 8s for 'A D[itt]o the Inside of the Concert Rooms at the Opera House'.<sup>5</sup> Oppé suggests that the difference in price can be accounted for by the presence of figures in the drawing of the Concert Room.<sup>6</sup>

Both views are unique. No earlier picture survives of the theatre's auditorium viewed from the stage, and there are no extant interior views of the concert room of 1793-94. To be sure, there are engraved sources for both spaces, but none show the complete structure; further, none of them have in the past been considered to be reliable representations of the building. In short, Rebecca's drawings allow us to re-consider these printed sources, and together, they transform our understanding both of the auditorium and of the concert room.

The attribution of the drawings to Rebecca rests on an understanding of 'the allegorical figures carefully executed on the ceiling'.<sup>7</sup> This still seems a possibility, although no further evidence as to their authorship has emerged. Rebecca (1734/5–1808) was born in Ancona and studied at the Accademia di San Luca in Rome, where he met the Anglo-American history painter, Benjamin West, who had arrived in Italy in 1760. West was on the Grand Tour with William Patoun, and became acquainted with a number of artists including Gavin Hamilton, Angelica Kauffman, and Raphael Mengs. Rebecca was back in London by 1761 - West followed in 1763 - and on 31 January 1769 was one of the first students to enter the Royal Academy Schools, an institution that West had helped found. The men continued to work together, Helmut Von Huff noting that Rebecca often assisted West,<sup>8</sup> and Joseph Farington, that Rebecca was buried in 1808 under West's direction.<sup>9</sup> Rebecca was elected an associate of the Royal Academy in 1771, but seems to have been less than successful with the works he showed there,<sup>10</sup> and went on to make his mark as a decorative painter of schemes both large and small; these included cartoons for glass at New College, Oxford,<sup>11</sup> work on the new rooms at Somerset House, paintings at Windsor Castle,<sup>12</sup> and the drawing for the admission ticket for the first performance of the Handel Commemoration in Westminster Abbey on 26 May 1784.<sup>13</sup>

The King's Theatre burnt down in 1789; it had been rebuilt in 1790 to the designs of the architect and stage designer, Michael Novosielski. The institution was at that stage embroiled in a situation involving the King's Theatre, a possible opera house in Leicester

Square, and what became the Pantheon Opera in Oxford Street. The key to this confusing situation is the fact that there was one license for opera awarded (usually) annually by the Lord Chamberlain. After the 1789 fire, the Lord Chamberlain had awarded the license to John Gallini, who had been managing the King's Theatre before the blaze; he was given permission to perform Italian opera in the Little Theatre in the Haymarket for the 1790-91 season only. In the meantime, William Taylor was building the King's Theatre anew, in the hope of receiving the opera license; the foundation stone of the building was laid by the Earl of Buckingham on 3 April 1790, and the theatre was finished by 1791.<sup>14</sup> The license, however, was not awarded to either to Taylor (who was, though, able to perform music and dance) or to the opera institution in Leicester Square. And at the same time, Gallini at the Little Theatre was refused an extension beyond the end of his season. The conversion of the Pantheon to an opera house was an answer to this situation, and it was granted a five-year license to perform Italian opera. But that institution lost large sums of money, and just after opening its second season, the building burnt to the ground in suspicious circumstances. The Pantheon Opera moved to Little Theatre in the Haymarket, and then subsequently merged with the King's Theatre, with the resultant company occupying the new house on the opposite side of the street. The first public performance of opera took place there for the season of 1792-93, on 26 January 1793.<sup>15</sup>

Now that the King's Theatre was back in the hands of the Opera, William Taylor, who had been appointed the theatre's manager, undertook alterations during the latter part of 1793, and for the 1793-94 season, it was noted that after the 'very numerous' changes, 'the *inside* as well as the *out* will wear next Winter a very different appearance'.<sup>16</sup> Taylor, it was remarked, 'has projected the alterations himself. If experience can shew what are the best accommodations, of operatical experience he has had enough'. And it is these drawings – whether by Rebecca or another – I will demonstrate below can be dated to these alterations.

## The auditorium

We have little idea of the auditorium of the King's Theatre as Novosielski left it in 1790; the surviving illustrations all show only the proscenium area. These prints are like many inexpensive engravings for 18th-century periodicals; the picture is somewhat vague, with large areas simply sketched in, presumably on the assumption that readers would supply details from their imaginations. The salient features, however, can frequently be verified from elsewhere, and it would be perverse to dismiss them because of their crudity.

As suggested by the artist of the drawing engraved for and published in the *Carlton House Magazine* (Fig.2), the auditorium appears to have had four tiers, three of boxes, and the fourth apparently offering three boxes on either side near the stage; these details can also be seen in a second, apparently anonymous, print.<sup>17</sup> Both views also show a pair of columns at the back of the proscenium, one of which makes a second pair either side of the stage boxes. The decoration illustrated is very straightforward and the clouds and Royal cartouche predictable; the curtain is drawn up in tableau form, with top swags being fixed and the curtains themselves rigged to pull up from the centre bottom corner of each side. The print also shows the basic nature of the auditorium and the primitive decoration, reflecting the speed at which the theatre was built, in a flawed process that would come back to haunt the institution about 20 years later.<sup>18</sup>

When compared to Rebecca's drawing, it can be seen that two distinct architectural features were added to the building in 1793-94. The first is the extra tier of boxes added at pit level; as figure 1 shows, the level of the original first tier is the same as that of the stage, and the height shown suggests there is more than enough room for the development Rebecca details. The second is that Rebecca's drawing details the cut back box divisions described in the *Morning Chronicle*:

The partitions of the boxes are scooped backward in an elegant curve, with craved and gilt brackets at the top, which prevents the awkward appearance of pigeon holes, which they would have if brought full forward...<sup>19</sup>

These are now shown as elegantly curved with decorative carvings, providing the boxes with distinctly improved sightlines to the stage, an alteration which can be clearly seen in the illustration of the auditorium in its 1796 form by Thomas Rowlandson and Augustus Charles Pugin in Rudolph Ackermann's *The Microcosm of London*. (Fig.3)

Rebecca also shows a central arch and a screen of four pairs of columns running across the middle of the gallery. It is this distinctive 'framing device' that provides the link between Rebecca's drawing of the opera house interior, and an engraving showing the theatre's proscenium that appeared in the *Lady's Pocket Magazine* on 1 April 1795, that is, after the 1793-94 decorations (Fig.4). It was published by Harrison & Co, the publisher who was active in producing sets of plays, images of players, and landscape scores of major works in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century. The artist was the Netherlands-born painter and engraver Benedictus Antonio Van Assen (ca.1767– ca.1817), and the engraver was James Sargant Storer (1771–1853), who spent much of his career producing small-scale topographical and architectural works.

Van Assen's engraving, titled the 'Opera House or the King's Theatre in the Haymarket', shows a view from the back of the auditorium. An opera is in progress; the male character appears to be dead, and the female character gesturing in despair. The performers are protected from possible incursions to the stage by two grenadiers, whose presence is mentioned in numerous commentaries, including the unfortunate one at the Pantheon Opera who became so intent on the action that he suffered the 'whole curtain... to descend upon his devoted head, which very fortunately only knocked off his black-fur cap for the entertainment of the audience'.<sup>20</sup> The asymmetrical design of the set and long view of mountainous

countryside of the back drop places it firmly in the fourth quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, while the curtains are still gathered to the top of the proscenium in a tableau design.

The audience that can be seen consists of occupants of the boxes and the gallery, and a somewhat disparate group of figures in the foreground, a type of no-man's-land audience that seems well dressed, but not particularly smart. They are gathered in an ill-defined area that appears too large to be a central box. The vantage point of the view is taken the line of sight centrally focused from what should be the best seats in the house. Further, the pairs of columns and the central arch (which, were it not for Rebecca's drawing, might be thought to be the product of the artist's imagination) provide a cut-away aperture for a view into the auditorium. In fact, the vantage point is the old gallery 'now divided into two, one at five shillings, the other at three'; as is clear from Rebecca's drawing, the arch and columns mark this new gallery division, hence Van Assen's emphasis on this development.<sup>21</sup>

Other details that both Van Assen and Rebecca record can be found closely described in an otherwise unnoted report in the *Morning Chronicle*. The author includes a description of the ceiling roundel:

The ceiling is formed into a dome, which springs from the centre of the arch of the frontispiece, and from groins above the entablature of the pillars, so that part of it over the orchestra is considerably lower than it was. Within a bold cornice is a circle of roses and medals, gilt, and within that Apollo and the Muses, painted in chiaro 'scuro. The ground filled with allegorical figures.<sup>22</sup>

The decoration on the front of the boxes, present in Rebecca's drawing, but not identifiable in its detailing, suggests an elaborate scheme of carving and gilding, mostly, of course, for show rather than substance.

The first tier of boxes is supported by octagon columns of variegated glass, with gilt caps and bases; the parapet, grotesque ornaments, divided into compartments, painted in oil; on canvas, as are those of all the others tiers.

The second tier is supported by caryatides, winged syrens, gilt; the parapet, Neptune and Amphitrite, attended by sea gods and goddesses.

The third tier is supported by griffins, gilt; the parapet, grotesque ornaments. The fourth tier is supported by rams, gilt; the parapet, grotesque ornaments.

The parapet of the boxes on either side of the gallery, balustrades painted on canvas.

On the top of the parapets, under each of the caryatides, is a sphinx, gilt.<sup>23</sup>

Both Rebecca and Van Assen show the open balustrade around the galleries to either side, each topped off with a rail that, in Van Assen's populated illustration, has figures standing beside it in such a way as to emphasize its function as a safety device. Van Assen also includes a number of substantial sconces each with six candles.

Van Assen's image suggests another alteration that appears to have been made to the structure, but one that has not been recorded clearly. This is the re-organisation of the columns, the entablature of the proscenium, and the stage boxes (Fig.5). The arch over the proscenium was retained and can be seen in Figure 3, and Van Assen's vantage point at the top of the building suggests that he was looking down at the top of its curve. The tiers seem then to have been extended over the stage on both sides round to the second column, with the curtain line being left behind the furthest column. Whether these columns are in fact new, or represent a series of adjustments to existing fabric is unclear, but the net result is that Novosielski's three columns seen in Figure 2 have now become:

two Corinthian pillars on each side, painted in marble, with their entablature white and gold, supporting a grand arch painted with white ornaments on a blue ground. In the

centre, his Majesty's arms, painted yellow, heightened with gold, and supported by Fame.<sup>24</sup>

From its different vantage point, Rebecca's drawing is consistent with Van Assen's; the boxes are shown running round to the new curtain line, while the curtains themselves obscure the columns. Removing the stage boxes represents a loss of income to be sure, but it was a loss that would have been more than compensated for by the extra income from the new tier of boxes.

There has clearly been some embarrassment among scholars at the Van Assen representation; the illustration has rarely been reproduced – it is, for example, omitted from both Shepherd's *Survey of London* and Nalbach's *The King's Theatre*<sup>25</sup>— and when it has been included by others, it has been tagged with no more than a passing generalized reference to the building. But Rebecca's drawing allows us to re-calibrate our understanding of Van Assen's perspective; instead of looking straight out across a round auditorium, the view is revealed as one looking down towards the stage, to the top of the proscenium columns, and up a long auditorium.

### **The New Subscription Room**

The second of Rebecca's drawings shows the inside of the New Subscription Room, a space that hosted many important events, and was the venue for Joseph Haydn's concerts on his second visit to London (Fig.5). The room was not only a major addition the theatre's amenities, but it involved the development of the Haymarket Street façade and the beginnings of a change in the relationship between the Opera House and the city.<sup>26</sup> The room was part of Novosielski's original scheme, but was not completed during the original work of rebuilding. The *World* reported:

The houses in the Haymarket come down, to make room for the remainder of the stone front – and here the grand Concert Room is to be situated.<sup>27</sup>

From Taylor's point of view, the room offered the possibility of an increased use of the building; as a rule, the Opera performed only on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, with the season running from late November to May. A concert room, then, had the potential to provide a new income stream for the administration, and at the same time, allow it to add a new attraction for the subscribers, if it was well managed. But it was not. The costs of the project, listed in a letter from Taylor asking for permission to extend the building, were claimed as follows;

Construction	£19,900
Decoration	1,460
Furnishings	10,600
New organ	580
Smith's work	1,083
Chandeliers	1,400
	£35,023 <sup>28</sup>

Price, Milhous, and Hume remark that 'this is a staggering sum for a bankrupt proprietor who was running a money-losing opera company,' and suggest that Taylor may have built the room on credit.<sup>29</sup> And in fact, the figures do not seem to stack up; it seems impossible for Taylor to have spent £10,000 on 'furnishings,' even at their most elaborate, and Rebecca's drawing suggests they were anything but.

Under Taylor's management – or mismanagement - the room became a matter of controversy. As the title 'New Subscription Room' suggests, it would, as proposed, have had limited admittance on opera nights, becoming a coffee room that 'communicates with the boxes'.<sup>30</sup> When the room was complete, however, Taylor

sent a circular to every subscriber at the head of a box, requiring them to pay six guineas subscription to this room, as a lounge or coffee room, or they would be superseded in their boxes.<sup>31</sup>

The outrage was such that a subscribers' meeting called at Willis's Coffee House resulted in the sending of various messages to Taylor, whose response was to reply grandly: 'Go, tell them I will throw open the room to them without any subscription'.<sup>32</sup> The result was that Taylor then received no extra income from the opera boxes to support the concert room – which might have been possible 'had it only been proposed only in a decent manner' – while at the same time, the Opera had to absorb the costs of the performers at the concerts.<sup>33</sup> It comes as no surprise to find that the title 'Subscription Room' was subsequently dropped, it then being billed as the 'New Room', or the 'Concert Room'.

The Opera House originally had no street frontage, with the exception of an entrance built in what was originally an alleyway from the Haymarket to the stable-yard in which the theatre had been constructed. The entrance to the old theatre had been marked by a rusticated, three-arch arcade with a room above; this entrance was the only part of the building to survive the 1789 conflagration. In Novosielski's design for the new building, this room was replaced by the first part of a new façade; it consisted of two bays 'fronted by a stone basement in rustic work, with the commencement of a very superb building of the Doric order, consisting of three pillars, two windows, an entablature, pediment, and balustrade'.<sup>34</sup> The only pictorial evidence of the building in the Haymarket streetscape at this point can be found in a caricature of those involved in the Opera House administration in 1791. The caricature 'The Modern Atlas,' shows the Prince of Wales as Atlas carrying the new Opera House on his back (Fig.6); the artist, Isaac Cruickshank, shows the building with the two bays completed, and with the row of houses in the Haymarket still standing to the left of the theatre's entrance. It was this row of houses that had to be demolished in order to construct Novosielski's concert room; these can

be seen on Edward Vanbrugh's 1776 map of the theatre's site. (Fig.7). A comparison between Vanbrugh's plan and the 1800 cross section of Novosielski's building drawn by Pugin and published by John Weale (Fig.8) shows that the new concert room also included some or all of King's Yard. This was an area that ran parallel to the Haymarket and provided both a side entrance to the pit at one end, and access to the street at the other. As a later anonymous watercolour illustrates, the money ran out before the new section was faced; had it been completed 'it would have contributed considerably to the splendour of London',<sup>35</sup> but as it was, the building was left an unfinished eyesore until it was faced by John Nash and George Repton between 1816 and 1818. (Fig.9).

What extra money there was, was spent on the decorating the concert room's interior. As constructed by Novosielski, it measured at 97 feet in length and 48 feet in width, with a floor area of 4,656 square feet;<sup>36</sup> according to the press, when compared with the Upper Room in Bath, Willis's Coffee Room, the London Tavern, the Crown and Anchor, and the room in Hanover Square, it was larger by 246 square feet and therefore the largest in England. With these measurements and a full audience, a reverberation time of 1.55 seconds in the middle frequencies and 2.4 in the upper ones has been suggested.<sup>37</sup> Reports describe it as a 'highly responsive and relatively reverberant' space, a reverberance that Haydn would exploit.<sup>38</sup> The room seated around 800 audience members, and an orchestra that regularly had around 60 members, a large band for the period.<sup>39</sup>

Pugin's cross-section shows a coved ceiling with decorative panels, paired Corinthian columns, shallow galleries, and a central door. The viewpoint in Rebecca's drawing is in the opposite direction, but Pugin's balancing paired columns at the other end of the room and painted panels can also be clearly seen. The creator of the decoration is not known, but the sculptural appearance of the room is may well have been *trompe l'oeil* of the type described by Edward Croft-Murray in writing on the decoration undertaken of the Royal Academy's new

rooms at Somerset House in which Rebecca participated. He records that ‘Reynolds painted the centrepiece, and Cipriani the cove panels of the ceiling of the Library; West, Angelica Kauffmann and Rebecca took charge of the ceiling of the Council Chamber; and Rigaud provided some feigned sculpture for the ante-room’.<sup>40</sup> The large statues Rebecca shows in the concert room seem likely to have been the type of ‘feigned sculpture’ of Croft-Murray’s description, given that money was in short supply.

The first recorded use of the concert room was on 3 March 1794, when it was used for serving ‘madeira, sherry, and port wines of the first quality’ during the 1794 Grand Masked Ball.<sup>41</sup> Masked balls were regular events at the King’s Theatre, and all the building’s spaces were pressed into service:

Messrs. GOWS will provide and conduct the Band for the Country Dances in the Theatre; and the Band belonging to His Royal Highnesses the Duke of YORK’s Regiment of Guards, will play in the Gallery, over the Great Entrance, the fore-part of the Night, and afterwards in the New Room during the time of Supper.<sup>42</sup>

It had already been touted as a venue:

It will be given on MONDAY Evenings, and will include several FRIDAYS in LENT, when CONCERTS of SACRED MUSIC, as well as ITALIAN ORATORIOS, by Handel, Paesiello, and Guglielmi, will be performed.<sup>43</sup>

The music and performers would be chosen by ‘a Committee of Professional Men, of whom Mr. CRAMER will be the principal, who would make the selection of the music to be heard.’<sup>44</sup> The involvement of Wilhelm Cramer, the widely respected leader of the opera orchestra, was clearly intended to be a guarantor of quality.

The room initially seems to have been used as a venue for Benefit concerts for a variety of theatre personnel, with, for example, those for Cramer, William Knyvett, Samuel Harrison, William Lee, and Giovanni Giornovich all being recorded in May.<sup>45</sup> This was a month which

also saw the installation of the room's organ built by Samuel Green 'Organ Builder to His Majesty', and which was inaugurated by Thomas Greatedorex on 15 May 1794.<sup>46</sup> The room began to entertain musicians of distinction, and for the 1794-1795 season Johann Salomon, who ran the concert series at the Hanover Square rooms, claimed that he found it 'impossible to procure the Vocal Performers of the first talents ... in the present situation of affairs on the Continent,'<sup>47</sup> and joined with the King's Theatre to stage the new Opera Concert series. In fact, the King's Theatre's singers were not, contractually, allowed to perform outside the building thus denying Salomon access to the best foreign voices available in the capital. Salomon's effusive announcement glossed over this, but it is the case that the first combined series has long been regarded as 'one of the supreme moments in the history of the concert life of London',<sup>48</sup> for it featured not only first class performers, but also Haydn himself, with the premieres of his last three symphonies, numbers 102 (Hob. 1/102), 103 'The Drumroll' (Hob. 1/103), and 104 'The London' (Hob. 1/103).

Rebecca's drawing goes some way to elucidating a report that appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* which noted that 'the last movement was encored: and notwithstanding an interruption by the accidental fall of one of the chandeliers, it was performed with no less effect'.<sup>49</sup> Albert Dies later wrote of the incident:

When Haydn appeared in the orchestra and seated himself at the Pianoforte, to conduct a symphony personally, the curious audience in the parterre left their seats and pressed forward towards the orchestra, with a view to seeing Haydn better at close range. The seats in the middle of the parterre were therefore empty, and no sooner were they empty but a great chandelier plunged down, smashed, and threw the company into great confusion.<sup>50</sup>

If the *Morning Chronicle* is correct, the audience move was to see Haydn perform during an encore. Rebecca's drawing shows the floor of the parterre – the area between the raked seating

– as being un-raked, suggesting that the crowd was not only able to move forward, but to easily move out of their seats and up to the orchestra, leaving them empty. The symphony in question (Hob. I/102) was subsequently dubbed ‘The Miracle’ to mark the audience’s narrow escape, although the nickname was later attached to a completely different work (Hob. I/96).

How long this interior lasted is not known – the theatres were regularly repainted, and few schemes lasted long - but by the end of George IV’s reign, the Concert Room was clearly less than fashionable, and had come down in the world:

The darkness, however, of the great saloon is in favour of its present condition, for the dirt is not so visible as if the lights were more powerful. But the cold which attacks the feet is a more serious evil. We counsel the ladies to bring foot-muffs with them, and the gentlemen to come in French clogs, while the wintry winds continues, or they may be drawn into a more frequent intercourse with their physicians than is either desirable or profitable.<sup>51</sup>

There were certainly some structural alterations about this time, for the oboist William Parke recorded that

In the room of the King’s Theatre, now styled the Kings’ Concert Room, which having recently undergone a variety of repairs and decorations, and being fitted up with boxes, &c., has assumed the appearance of an elegant little theatre.’<sup>52</sup>

The ‘elegant little theatre’ in this form, though, seems to have been short lived, and the concert room itself was destroyed in the fire that gutted the theatre in 1867, several decades after it has ceased to be a fashionable adjunct to London’s house for elite opera and dance.

## **Conclusion**

Novosielski’s building was to be altered again in the summer of 1795, when it was noted that four boxes were ‘added in the pit’. Just where in the pit these were sited is unclear for Rebecca’s drawing shows it to be full, although it is possible that this meant that some of the

boxes were re-divided. The only commentary we have on the space at this time is a report published in 1809, but one purporting to describe the house of 1795:

The construction of the house was, however, neither elegant nor convenient, and the boxes were so irregularly formed, as to render the appearance of the house by no means pleasing to the eye.<sup>53</sup>

It was these 'defects' that 'induced Mr. Taylor and Mr. Jewell to new model the interior of the building', and the additional boxes were swept away in the much more substantial alterations that were undertaken after the 1796-97 season. These were in the hands of Gaetano Marinari (*fl.* 1764–c.1844),<sup>54</sup> who was employed to alter the building, John Feltham remarking that 'every part of the theatre, except the stage, received all the improvements the genius of the artist could suggest'.<sup>55</sup> Marinari's work included the removal of the remaining proscenium columns and the stage picture frame, thereby creating the familiar and distinctive open stage, and the suspended proscenium arch with the dramatically sweeping boxes depicted by Rowlandson and Pugin. (Fig.3)

There is no doubt that Rebecca's sense of the Opera House and its function has left us with the most detailed and informative pictures that survive of its interior. But what purpose did Rebecca's drawings of the Opera House serve? There are a number of possibilities. One is that the high level of detail in both of them suggests that they may have been preparatory drawings for high quality engravings, perhaps to mark the completion of the new arrangement of the proscenium, the new decorative scheme for the auditorium, and the new concert room in 1793-94. Another is that Rebecca himself was commissioned to work up an interior decorative scheme for the theatre and concert room, and these represent his proposals for both spaces. He is a likely contender for the job, and there was no contemporary attribution of the interior scheme, nor other suggestion since. If this is the case, then the proposals seem to have

been carried out, at least in part; as discussed above, the panels detailed by Pugin appear to echo those seen in Rebecca's drawing. (Fig.8)

But why did the Prince of Wales buy these particular pictures? As it happens, they may represent nostalgia for a scheme that did not come off. At the end of 1790 – with both the new King's Theatre and the Pantheon Theatre buildings constructed, and the development of two opera companies well underway – the Prince chaired a committee of nobles who worked to effect a merger of the two enterprises, it being obvious that two competing companies in London was 'lunacy'.<sup>56</sup> The committee met at the Prince of Wales's nearby Carlton House on 31 December 1790; further meetings followed on January 6, 16, and 19, but all were ultimately to no avail.<sup>57</sup> No agreement (however unrealistic) could be reached, and the promoters at the Pantheon opened their venue, while Taylor was left with the unlicensed King's Theatre. Taylor did manage to get dance put on from 10 March 1791, which the Prince of Wales attended occupying his double box, and on 5 April 'gave a grand dinner to several friends at Carlton-House, after which he went to the Haymarket Opera House'.<sup>58</sup> So when, on the following day, 6 April 1791, Forres published Cruikshank's caricature of the Prince as Atlas (Fig.6), it is little wonder that he is shown struggling along the screen of Carlton House towards the Haymarket corner, where the King's Theatre was sited. Cruikshank's Prince of Wales may well have said that he 'would take it all on my own back', but the unresolvable machinations of the opera companies – not to mention their enormous debts – were just too 'dam'd heavy'.

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<sup>1</sup> For accounts of the King's Theatre during the period under discussion, see Curtis A. Price, Judith Milhous, and Robert D. Hume, *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-century London. Volume 1, The King's Theatre, Haymarket, 1778-1791* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), and their 'The Rebuilding of the King's Theatre, Haymarket, 1789-1791', *Theater Journal* 43 (1991), pp.421-44; Michael Burden, 'Visions of dance at the King's Theatre: reconsidering London's "opera house"', *Music in Art*:

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*International Journal for Music Iconography* 36/1-2 (2011), pp.92-116; and ‘Regular meetings: Gallini and Noverre in London 1756-1794, in Michael Burden and Jennifer Thorp, eds, in *The works of Monsieur Noverre translated from the French: Noverre, his circle, and the English Lettres sur la danse* (New York: Pendragon Press, 2014), pp.137-56.

<sup>2</sup> A. P. Oppé, *English Drawings, Stuart and Georgian Periods, in the Collection of His Majesty The King at Windsor Castle* (London: Phaidon, 1950), as nos 486 and 487.

<sup>3</sup> Gillian D’Arcy Wood, *Romanticism and Music Culture in Britain, 1770-1840: Virtue and Virtuosity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.134.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Wilkinson, *Londina Illustrata* (London: Robert Wilkinson, 1818).

<sup>5</sup> Invoice from Colnaghi and Co to George, Prince of Wales, 9 July 1804. RA  
GEO/MAIN/27269.

<sup>6</sup> A. P. Oppé, *op. cit.*, p.82.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Helmut Von Erffa, ‘Benjamin West at the Height of His Career’, *The American Art Journal* 1/1 (1969), pp.19-33. 21, n. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Farington, *The Dairy of Joseph Farington*, IX: ed. Kathryn Cave (London; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 27 Feb 1808.

<sup>10</sup> Malise Forbes Adam, ‘Rebecca, Biagio’ in H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, eds, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 60 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press), XLVI, p.244. See also Michael W. D. Norman, *Biagio and John Biagio Rebecca: a sketch towards a biography* (Shoreham-by-Sea: Private print, 2001), p.2.

<sup>11</sup> There is a small watercolour of the range of three windows for the Chapel nave in the New College collection, NCI 605, gifted of C F Bell, 1924, and a series of the individual figures for the window in the York City Art Gallery.

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- <sup>12</sup> Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative painting in England, 1537–1837* (London: Country Life, 1970), II, p.258.
- <sup>13</sup> See Michael Burden, ‘Metastasio, Shakespeare, and the idea of Opera at the Pantheon’, forthcoming. There are numerous examples of the ticket, see, for example, British Museum 1977,U.654.
- <sup>14</sup> *The Times*, 5 April 1790.
- <sup>15</sup> William C. Smith, *The Italian Opera and Contemporary Ballet in London, 1789-1820: a record of performances and players, with reports from the journals of the time* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1955), p.24.
- <sup>16</sup> *World*, 10 August 1793.
- <sup>17</sup> ‘Inside View of the Opera House, London’: Victoria and Albert Museum S.2879-2013.
- <sup>18</sup> As early as 1795, Michael Kelly records that ‘part of the walls of the theatre were blown down’; *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly of the King’s Theatre* (London: Henry Colburn, 1826), II, p.401. The theatre temporarily lost its license in 1825 with the Lord Chamberlain prohibiting any more performances ‘until the building was surveyed and reported to be safe’; John Ebers, *Seven Years of the King’s Theatre* (London: William Ainsworth 1828), p.150.
- <sup>19</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 13 January 1794.
- <sup>20</sup> Harvard scrapbook, p.109.
- <sup>21</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 13 January 1794.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>25</sup> F. H. W. Shepherd (ed.), *Survey of London*, 52 vols (London: P. S. King and Son, 1900-): *The Parish of St. James Westminster, I: South of Piccadilly*, 29-30 (London: The Athlone Press, 1960),

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and Daniel Nalbach, *The King's Theatre 1704-1867: London's First Italian Opera House* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1972).

<sup>26</sup> Michael Burden, 'London's Opera House in the Urban Landscape', in Suzanne Aspden, ed., *Operatic Geographies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2018), forthcoming.

<sup>27</sup> *World*, 10 August 1793.

<sup>28</sup> National Archives CRES 6/121, p.337, cited in Judith Milhouse, Gabriella Dideriksen, and Robert D. Hume, *Italian opera in late eighteenth century London. Volume 2 The Pantheon Opera and its Aftermath 1789-1795* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), pp.236-67.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.237.

<sup>30</sup> *The Thespian*, 1793.

<sup>31</sup> Veritas [pseud.], *Opera House: A Review of this Theatre from the Period Described by the Enterpriser* (London: Printed for the Author, 1818), in Michael Burden, *London Opera Observed 1711-1844*, 5 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), IV, p.308.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> The role this played in the finances of the theatre is further discussed in Milhous, Dideriksen, and Hume (2001), *op. cit.*, pp.236-40.

<sup>34</sup> James Pellar Malcolm, *Londinium Redivivum Or an Antient History and Modern Description of London*, 4 vols. (London: Nichols and Son, 1802), IV, p.315.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *General Evening Post*, 25-27 February 1794.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Forsyth, *Building for Music: the architect, the musician, and the listener from the seventeenth century to the present day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.16.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> More discussion of the room's acoustical properties can be found in Michael Barron, *Auditorium Acoustics and Architectural Design* (London: E & FN Spon, 1993), pp.66-68.

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- <sup>40</sup> Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative painting in England, 1537–1837* (London: Country Life, 1970), II: The Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries, p.68.
- <sup>41</sup> *Morning Post*, 21 February 1794; 1 March 1794.
- <sup>42</sup> *Morning Post*, 1 March 1794.
- <sup>43</sup> *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, 13 January 1794.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, 6 May 1794; *World*, 5 May 1794; *Morning Post*, 28 May 1794.
- <sup>46</sup> *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, 5 May 1794.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 January 1795.
- <sup>48</sup> Warwick Lister, *Amico: The Life of Giovanni Battista Viotti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.202.
- <sup>49</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 3 February 1795. Also mentioned by Veritas, *op.cit.*, p.309.
- <sup>50</sup> Albert Dies, *Biographische Nachrichten von Joseph Haydn* (Vienna: Camesina, 1810), p.95f; trans. quoted in H. C. Robbins Landon, *Haydn Chronicle and Works, III: Haydn in England 1791-1795* (London: Thomas and Hudson, 1976), p.287.
- <sup>51</sup> ‘The Philharmonic Concerts’, *The Harmonicon*, 7/1 (1830), p.67.
- <sup>52</sup> W. T. Parke, *Musical Memoirs* (London, 1830), II, pp.280-81.
- <sup>53</sup> John Feltham, *The Picture of London for 1806* (London: Printed by Lewis and Hamblin, et al., 1806),
- <sup>54</sup> F. H. W. Shepherd (ed.), *Survey of London*, 52 vols (London: P. S. King and Son, 1900-): *The Parish of St. James Westminster, I: South of Piccadilly*, 29-30 (London: The Athlone Press, 1960), XXIX, pp.238-39.
- <sup>55</sup> Feltham, *op. cit.*, p.259.
- <sup>56</sup> Milhous, Dideriksen, and Hume (2001), *op. cit.*

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<sup>57</sup> *Times*, 4 January 1791; *Morning Chronicle*, 7 January 1791; *London Chronicle* 15-18 January 1791; *Times*, 21 January 1791.

<sup>58</sup> *Times*, 6 April 1791.