

GODSON & COLES

FINE ART & ANTIQUE FURNITURE

92 Fulham Road, London, SW3 6HR, United Kingdom - Tel: +44 (20) 7584 2200 - Web: www.godsonandcoles.co.uk



A rare George III period demi-lune marquetry commode depicting scenes from Orpheus and Eurydice in the underworld

Possibly By William Ince and John Mayhew

English, circa 1780

DESCRIPTION

The semi-elliptical top cross-banded in tulipwood, harewood and goncalo alvez inlaid with cornucopia and mimosa; the central marquetry tablet depicting Orpheus, Pluto and Persephone before his journey into the Underworld, surrounded by inlay of urns, bellflowers and mimosa; the base with three frieze drawers veneered with parquetry and inlay over three panels; the central door with a marquetry panel depicting Orpheus and Eurydice being banished into the Underworld by Persephone as the dogs of Hades look on; the two side panels depicting muses surrounded by ribbons and swags; the tapering legs terminating in block feet.

Height: 35 ½ in (90cm)

Width: 47 ½ in (120cm)

Depth: 23 ¼ in (59cm)

Provenance:

Baron and Lady Samuel of Wych Cross Place, Surrey

The attribution of this commode of Mayhew and Ince, one of the most significant firms of London cabinetmakers of the late 18th century, is largely based on the fine quality of the marquetry inlay in variously coloured and engraved woods and the strongly Neo-classical elements of the design. The firm is recorded to have worked with the architect Robert Adam on many important commissions including Croome Court and Shelbourne Castle and his influence is demonstrated in 'their ability to produce very early on, furniture in the most startling advanced Neo-classical taste... and certainly owed much to their early collaboration with the country's leading Neo-classical architects' (Beard and Gilbert, *The Dictionary of Furniture Makers 1660-1840*). The overall form of this commode, the quality of design and the marquetry, also suggest Mayhew and Ince as a possible maker.

The Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice tells the story of Orpheus playing joyfully on his lute while his new bride Eurydice was dancing on the meadows and stepped on a venomous snake, dying instantly. Overcome with grief he then played and sang so mournfully that the nymphs and gods wept and told him to travel to the Underworld to retrieve her. His beautiful music softened the hearts of Hades and Persephone and he was allowed to take Eurydice back to the living on condition that he must walk in front of her and not look back until they reached the upper world. However, just as they reached the portals of Hades and daylight, Orpheus could not help but turn around to gaze at her face, and Eurydice vanished again from his sight, this time forever.

The moving story of Orpheus and Eurydice was turned into an opera by Cristoph Willibald Gluck, and was first performed in Vienna in October 1762.