

So they gave him the bird!

bird!

I PUT on my soberest suit and headed for Broadcasting House. On the way I practised crooking my little finger in a genteel, "afternoon tea" manner.

I was going to the rehearsal of a play, and expected to meet some rather fragile, dear old ladies and gentlemen. For this was "steam" radio.

I was wrong. The studio was bustling with modern activity.

Looking through the producer's glass panel on to the studio floor, I saw some of Britain's most famous stars.

There was lovely Yvonne Mitchell, Max Adrian—one of London's leading revue artists—and actor Peter Coke.

There were also the owners of such famous voices as Belle Chrystall, Simon Lack, Mairhi Russell, John Gabriel, Marjorie Mars and Jeffrey Segal. Plus the full force of the BBC's Drama Repertory Company.

The play was "Tristan of Cornwall"—really our old friends "Tristan and Isolde" without the opera music.

Producer Charles Lefeaux—in shirt-sleeves—sat by a control panel full of lights, knobs and dials.

"Sit down," he said, out of the corner of his mouth, and turned his attention to the scene before him.

Yvonne Mitchell and Peter Coke were "playing" to the unresponsive head of a microphone. Their voices came out of



YVONNE MITCHELL
—gulls or gannets?

a loudspeaker, muddled with the cries of gulls.

We were on the Cornish coast.

The gulls emanated from a record turntable. Studio Manager (Sound) Desmond Briscoe sat with one hand on the playing arm, staring moodily at the revolving disc. When the record came to an end he flipped the arm back to the beginning.

"More gulls!" cried the producer. "Let's be reckless. I like them."

Desmond stopped the record, got up slowly, and walked towards his boss with a wild look in his eyes.

"Gulls," he hissed. "Always gulls. I'm fed-up with gulls. Let's have a change."

"Penguins?" suggested the producer's assistant.

"No, gannets," said Desmond, brushing aside the sarcasm. "I've got some lovely gannets here." And he rushed back to his turntable.

Mr. Lefeaux gave in with a weary nod of the head. A new kind of wail came through the loudspeaker.

On the studio floor, Peter Coke and Yvonne Mitchell were still going strong. Gulls or gannets—it didn't seem to make any difference to them.

But the producer was not satisfied.

"More feeling, please, Peter," he called. "We don't want any more of that Mrs. Dale's Diary stuff."

The rehearsal continued. Without warning, a crowd of artists poured into the studio, positioned themselves around a

microphone, said a few lines, and as quickly melted away.

Yvonne and Peter were alone once more. Yvonne was crying.

"Sky and sea torment me;
My body and this my life...."
Silence.

"Go on," said Mr. Lefeaux. A puzzled voice came through the speaker: "Charlie—is my body being tormented—and my life? What does it mean?"

Mr. Lefeaux called for the script, and began to read. He put a hand to his brow, and called for a glass of water.

"I dunno," he said.

As I crept from the control room, I heard Mr. Lefeaux's voice calling: "More wind, Desmond. Wind, please." A veritable gale blew from the speaker. Desmond was on the job.

● "Tristan of Cornwall" will be broadcast on the Home Service on April 16. I shall be listening. I wouldn't miss it for anything.

By
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