

Between Windward and Lee

NORMAN FITKIN

Photographs by the author

The shimmering silver (no Cinemoid here) path across the calm sea (the back drop) brings moonlight (the real stuff) to back light the scene. Long shadows falling down stage, twinkling lights of little ships and massed lights of distant liners, the rhythmic beam from the lighthouse at Lizard Point some twenty miles up stage right sweeps the night sky beneath the stars.

The audience, carved to the granite seats or perched on grassy ledges, sit spell-bound by the beauty of the night; whilst the performance proceeds unheeded. No plot of man's creation could match the magic of the night.

The moon half hides behind a cloud and eyes once more focus on actors strutting the stage in the warm light of Patt. 543, 523, 123, 23N and various other lanterns.

Happily the weather favours those that labour and those that watch at this unique theatre. But variety being the spice of life—it is not always thus. The wind will worry the water until the sea surges over the rocks and reflections are but a mental image. A Cornish mist, all-enveloping, deadens sounds, silencing the fretting of the sea. The



The stage in daylight.

wind may struggle to gale force with salt spray and blown spume swirling high above the theatre perched midway twixt cliff top and wave's edge. It can even rain! Then water penetrates not only down the necks of actors and audience alike, but also into lanterns, connections, plugs and sockets, and, worst of all, it saturates the asbestos insulated tails still found on some of the older lanterns; sometimes with unfortunate results.

The performance will continue during the resulting black-out, while a breathless electrician climbs the cliff path to the "pill box", that defensive wartime relic that now does duty as box office, and also houses that accursed thing, the earth trip. It is the cumulative total earth leakage from many sources that proves our undoing. The number of circuits, and therefore the possible points of leakage, must be reduced until "drying out" effects a cure.

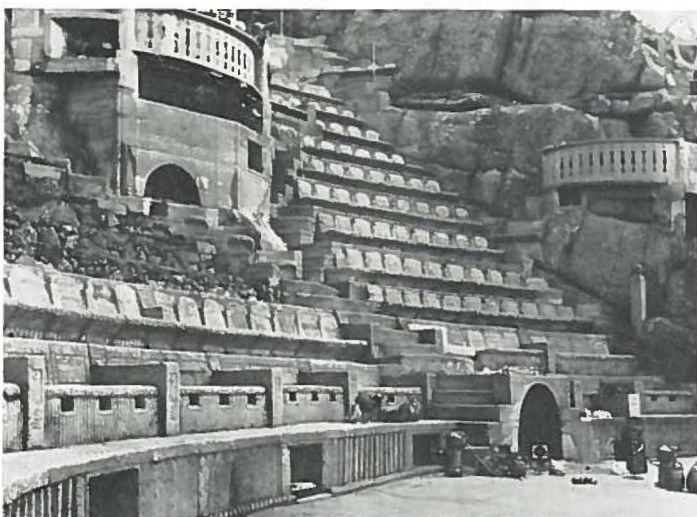
In lighting control all channels are cleared in readiness to re-establish illumina-

tion on the stage and then to pick up the lighting and sound plots perhaps several pages further on, whence the action has progressed by the light of torches.

It is indeed fortunate the D.B.O., which includes all dressing room and path lights, occurs far less frequently than might be expected from our typical English summers.

The Minack Theatre is quite unique, set in the face of the cliff high above the sea. It is the creation of Miss Rowena Cade, who, over many years, has worked with her own hands to build first the stage and then the terraced seating in the granite cliff, and continues with improvements year after year.

From one or two plays performed during the summer, the season has grown to a programme of ten or more different productions. A new company, almost invariably amateurs, opens each Monday night, playing for the week. Saturday the incoming company begin their portorage



The auditorium—rigging the lighting.



The Minack's history is inscribed on the seats.