

FAULT-RIDDEN "MAHAGONNY"

Problematic Weill unmastered

ONLY a few days before their departure for London, the Hamburg Staatsoper presented on Sunday as their first new production of the 1962-63 season Kurt Weill's "Rise and Fall of the Town of Mahagonny," for which Bertolt Brecht wrote the libretto.

Even to-day some courage is required to stage a work which has had a precarious career in Germany ever since its tumultuous premiere in 1930, and the Hamburg Intendant, Herr Rolf Liebermann, is to be congratulated on braving a possible storm.

In the event, overt objections were mild and limited to the pavements outside the opera house. Within, frequent applause was the only interruption, and at the end there was an ovation.

Would that the performance had been worthy of the magnanimous spirit in which it was received. "Mahagonny," despite its superficial simplicity, is undoubtedly one of the most difficult and problematic works in the modern operatic repertoire.

WRONG NOTES

Neither the producer, Egon Monk, nor the conductor, Janos Kulka, have yet mastered it.

In a veritable forest of wrong notes, faulty phrasings and downright misrepresentations, the production moved like a muscle-bound caterpillar, by turns hitching itself up, pausing and collapsing. Only at a few points, notably the first choral entry in the hurricane scene, did music and staging coalesce.

That the work survives at all is a tribute to its intrinsic power, to the (unhappily adulterated) designs of the late Caspar Neher, and to the efforts of a fine cast.

Toni Blankenheim was outstanding as Dreieinigkeitsmoses, Helmut Melchert dramatically sound as Jim, and Gisela Litz an intelligent Begbick. The most daring stroke of casting was Helga Pilarczyk as Jenny.

With proper musical and dramatic direction she could be brilliant, but even misguided as she often was on this occasion she brought dignity and musicianship to a very hazardous role. D. D.