Off to Mahagonny
DAVID DREW

On Sunday a television production of Well's and Brecht's opera _The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny_ was televised on the BBC. In the circumstances some preliminary observations may be more useful than a re-
view. _Mahagonny_ is not Well's masterpiece, but is certainly a far better example of the need of cooperation between the two dozen of them - on his reputation as a major 20th-century composer should rest, but as a musical dramatist the musical talent of Ban- position, a good performance of _Mahagonny_ is particularly valuable. But what are the criteria? I would suggest two, lying within its legal rights, the BBC has used, without reference to us, the translation prepared by Michael Geliot and myself which has been performed on the stage and have been at odds with the Corporation over this. Nevertheless we wish the broadcast what-
that _Mahagonny_ will have been on the stage, we intended only to suggest certain principles relevant to the composer's interests. Brecht's position, fortunately, is well-known, 'Weelke,' wrote Wellke, 'makes possible a construction according to purely musical laws.' This re-
marks are too general. Nevertheless, the reasons _Mahagonny_ has been so com-
monly encountered - by the musically ignorant, who are attracted by fairy-tale operas, or, less justly, by the old tale that it is an 'attack on opera.' The BBC doubts knows better than this. However, the 'purely musical' production is likely to lead to certain problems from the television point of view. Wellk declared that in the production a constant attention must be given to the text that must be presented clearly, and to the performers in such a way that the work is an almost concert-like style of music-making.

An extreme example of the concertante style of production is that of a production of _Mahagonny_ that Wellk wanted the two players to be placed far apart and facing the audience is already the broadest approach. The BBC's version of _Mahagonny_ is not a trace. It will be interesting to see on Sunday how the required sense of remoteness has been related to the unavoidable inter-
terference of the television medium. Such matters however, are incidental to the broader question of musical form: and here the problem of the relationship of the music and the words, the tempo is all-important. The BBC version of _Mahagonny_ is billed to last 90 minutes, which in itself is not an unreasonable allowance for a dramatic work of this kind. The time limit is a third of the score has been cut. It is im-
portant to distinguish between such a version and a stage production on its own. Although sensibly a number-opera, _Mahagonny_ is in effect through-composed. Thus the success of Act One depends on the interpretation of the piece is a whole, and not on any isolated number or melodic line. The finale of _Mahagonny_ is a notable exception. It is a story which some regard as the clue to the 'toughness' and indeed the meaning of _Mahagonny_ - is bound to interest the television audience. In that case the music's conscience is silenced and the vul-

ity which is one of the opera's subjects is the rule of its posing.