

January comes, and we begin the long crawl up to the spring. Still much work in choir, as we practise for upcoming performances, including our next concert, where gay motley can replace serious Church music.

This includes the “Geographical Fugue” by Ernst Toch, a spoken piece and an exercise in tongue dexterity and rapid lip movement. The song runs through place names including Lake Titicaca, Honolulu and Popocatepetl, but sadly not Timbuktu or Samarkand, but you can’t fit everywhere in a short song. There is a five-year-old girl reciting it on YouTube, so there is hope for us.

We practise “Glorious and Powerful God” by Stanford (not for the concert). The Choir’s initial reaction is adverse. Jeff seems unsure too, but re-presents it at the next rehearsal, where it improves, but still doesn’t seem one of Stanford’s best. Still, music often takes a while to understand and develop. Jeff says he is trying it out himself for the first time, without considering when or where we might perform it: I can’t imagine it is often performed, so Bledlow may get a novel treat.

We sing matins at Bledlow on 29 January, presided by Bob Uglow. This was a lovely service with great hymns. I had missed the rehearsal. The choir sang “Cantate Domino” by Pitoni (1657-1743), and “Blest are the pure in heart” by Walford Davies (1869-1941). I’d rehearsed “Blest are the pure in heart” earlier, and it is easy, but the speed of Cantate Domino can take you by surprise, and you need your wits about you, but everyone else had their wits present, and sang it well.

It was cold in the chancel, and as you sang, you spread mist 3 feet forwards. I thought of engines in the Reverend Awdry’s books, puffing steam in an engine shed in winter, and I thought about Henry Raeburn’s painting of the Reverend Walker skating, which would be my luxury on a desert island: the Rev. Walker skates effortlessly over the ice with arms folded, a quiet smile, and dressed like a dandy in black frock coat and white cravat. My records on the Island would include Bledlow choir singing an evensong to remind me of home.

Jeff can’t make our next practice, so Cynthia takes it, and kindly lets us do the Geographical Fugue at slower speed, which is a mercy, and works, as it is easier to work out where you come in. We will have to speed up again when Jeff returns: choirs sometimes end with a *molto accelerando*, which could be interesting.

Cynthia also takes us through the “Cantique de Jean Racine” by Gabriel Fauré, which will be lovely when learnt. Cynthia coaches us on correct French pronunciation. I recently heard a French choir singing Purcell, and a German choir singing a Latin Mass, both strangely pronounced. It might be fun to find a French audience for the Cantique, and watch their puzzled faces, though after Cynthia has finished with us, they may understand the odd word. A bientôt, Rob.