

Chansons de Matin et de Nuit, Op 15

Two short pieces arranged for violin and piano or for small orchestra.

Approximate Length : 4 minutes (Chanson de Nuit);
3 minutes (Chanson de Matin)

First Performance (Orchestral Versions) :

Date : 14 September 1901
Venue : Queen's Hall, London
Conductor : Sir Henry Wood

Dedicated to :

Chanson de Nuit : F Ehrke,
violinist in Worcester Philharmonic
Orchestra
Chanson de Matin : No dedication

During 1897, Elgar first became acquainted with A J Jaeger, the Novello's employee who became Nimrod of the Enigma Variations. From the start, they were frank in their exchange of views. In October 1897, Elgar, who by this time already had a number of comparative successes under his belt, wrote to Jaeger bemoaning the lack of financial reward he had received for his works. To those who knew Elgar, such melancholic moods were not uncommon and perhaps not to be taken too seriously, although they did reflect the parlous financial existence of a composer at that time.

Within ten days of his letter to Jaeger, Elgar sent Novello's a short piece for violin and piano which he called Evensong, although he suggested to Novello's that they might prefer the name Vespers. In the event, believing that French titles sold better, they published it as Chanson de Nuit. Elgar no doubt regarded it as little more than a pot boiler, a quick way of earning much needed funds, although the work contains a depth of sincerity and emotion not commonly found in pot boilers then or since.

In March 1899, shortly after completing the orchestration of the Enigma Variations, Elgar sent Novello's another short piece for violin and piano. He claimed to have recently rediscovered and completed it, having originally intended it as a companion piece to Evensong. He therefore suggested to Novello's that they publish it as Chanson de Matin, which they did.

In January 1901, Elgar sent Novello's orchestral arrangements of the two works. This helped accelerate their rising popularity and it is in this form that they are usually heard today. Chanson de Matin in particular retains a wide public affection out of all proportion to the effort it must have taken Elgar to produce it. But, while there is no denying the direct appeal of its pure melody, it is Chanson de Nuit that is in many ways the better, more carefully constructed composition. It has, however, largely been eclipsed by the popularity of the former.

