



Henri Verbrugghen, about 1920, around the time he became music director of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra. It is not known why his forehead is bandaged. (MNHS COLLECTIONS)

## Music in the Dust

**I**N THE SUMMER before my senior year, I worked in the Department of Music at Carleton College. I was responsible for transferring the music library's collection of vinyl records to cassette tapes—hundreds, maybe thousands of them. Turntables circled and tape reels revolved, and the days passed slowly.

Sometimes I wandered the Music Building. My favorite haunt was the dank basement, a jumble of boxes, antique desks and chairs, and neglected musical instruments. On a section of shelving, I noticed a pile of oversized papers. I blew off the dust and examined them.

They were handwritten music manuscripts: orchestral arrangements of one of Franz Schubert's *Marches Militaire* and something titled *Waiata Poi: Maori Song Dance*, among a dozen of them. In elegant India ink script, the title pages bore the name of the arranger, one Henri Verbrugghen.

Verbrugghen was unknown to me. I only understood I had discovered manuscripts that were possibly valuable. I had to get them to someone who could preserve them. I gathered up the papers and walked across the lawn to the library, which housed the college archives.

There the archivist accepted the manuscripts and regarded me with grudging respect. I never again saw the manuscripts. But I couldn't forget them, and I looked up Henri Verbrugghen in music reference books. A highly regarded Belgian violin prodigy, teacher, and conductor of the early twentieth century, he led an orchestra in Sydney, Australia, before becoming the second music director of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra (now the Minnesota Orchestra) in 1922.

Verbrugghen's tenure in Minneapolis—which included acclaimed recordings and tours—ended in 1931 when he collapsed from a stroke during a rehearsal. Too ill to continue directing a major orchestra, he moved on to Carleton in 1933 to chair the music department. He died the following year at the age of 61.

No doubt the multitude of cassette tapes I created that summer was trashed long ago. But the artifacts I found from the end of Verbrugghen's career continue to illuminate his musical talents. Carleton still preserves them in its archives, and maybe, someday, his music will come alive again.

—Jack El-Hai



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