

Heroes Among Us – A Musical Tribute

By Henry Cheng

What does it mean to be a hero?

We often think of heroes as extraordinary figures from myth and legend, but today, we recognize that heroism lives in everyday acts of resilience, compassion, and courage. It's in the bravery of first responders, the quiet strength of communities, and the shared spirit that connects us all through life's challenges and triumphs. Tonight's program explores the many facets of heroism, tracing a journey from individual courage to collective resilience. Through music, we'll reflect on the heroes among us—and within us.

We begin with Valerie Coleman's *Seven O'Clock Shout*, a powerful tribute to the first responders who served on the frontlines during the COVID-19 pandemic. During those uncertain times, communities around the world came together every evening at 7 p.m.—opening windows, banging pots and pans, and cheering—to show their gratitude for healthcare workers, paramedics, police officers, and firefighters. Coleman captures the spirit of those moments, reminding us that heroism often shows itself in the most immediate and selfless acts. This piece honors those who run toward danger to protect others and celebrates the strength of a community united in gratitude.

From here, our journey moves inward with Edvard Grieg's *Piano Concerto in A Minor*, which invites us to consider the personal and introspective side of heroism. Grieg's music is deeply rooted in his Norwegian heritage, incorporating folk melodies that connect the soloist's journey to a broader cultural identity. In this concerto, the hero is not an isolated figure but someone shaped and supported by their roots, traditions, and community. The dialogue between the soloist and orchestra mirrors the hero's journey—moments of struggle, triumph, and return. It's a reminder that our personal stories are woven into the fabric of those who came before us, and that heroism often draws from the strength and resilience of a collective past.

Finally, we close with Beethoven's *Symphony No. 7*, which expands the idea of heroism to encompass all of humanity. This symphony radiates joy, vitality, and celebration of life itself. Often described as one of Beethoven's most rhythmically driven works, it captures the essence of perseverance and the shared human experience. Beethoven presents heroism not as something reserved for the extraordinary, but as a quality inherent in all of us. It's found in the triumphs and struggles we experience together, and in our collective capacity to endure, rebuild, and thrive. Through its rhythmic energy and uplifting spirit, *Symphony No. 7* speaks to the resilience of the human spirit and reminds us that heroism is a universal human quality.

Tonight's program takes us on a journey through these layers of heroism—from the immediate and tangible courage of first responders, to the deeply personal resilience found in our stories and traditions, to the universal strength that unites us as human beings. These pieces remind us that heroes are not distant figures from history. They are all around us—in our families, our communities, and even in ourselves. Through music, we honor their stories, and we remind ourselves of the enduring connections that make us resilient, courageous, and—ultimately—heroic together.

Thank you for joining us on this journey. It's a privilege to share this music with you.

Warmly,
Henry Cheng