OKC Phil's concert was full of colliding contrasts

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The OKC Phil’s latest Classics performance, led by Alexander Mickelthwate, featured the “Colliding Contrasts” of Anna Clyne’s 2016 symphonic ballet “RIFT,” and Anton Bruckner’s “Symphony No. 7.”

Among the most esteemed contemporary composers in recent years, Clyne draws from eclectic influences and styles to create a unique and compelling sound. Choreographer and Artistic Director Larry Keigwin, along with his remarkable New York-based dance company (Brandon Coleman, Paul Giarratano, and Selina Shira Hack), and OKC Ballet dancers (Alejandro Gonzalez, Joseph Hetzer, Autumn Klein, and Amy Potter) brought the 25-minute "RIFT" to life with splendid technique and captivating grace. This work beautifully embodied the theme of the program: colliding contrasts. Both the music and choreography melded elegant, classical styles, with more innovative, free, contemporary idioms. This move toward including more diverse multimedia performances at the Phil is a welcome trend.

The second half carried us back to the height of Romanticism with Bruckner’s reverent, mystical, and deeply personal masterpiece, “Symphony No. 7.” In a chat with some audience members, I found I was not alone in having never heard this piece performed live. If this is part of a larger Bruckner revival, I’m absolutely here for it.

This performance was also full of colliding contrasts, given Bruckner’s progressive use of harmony and orchestration, and his expressions of devout religiosity and respect for traditional forms. Complete with a full row of Wagnerian tubas, the orchestra sounded magnificent, and truly did this Herculean, 70-minute work justice. Every section of the ensemble, including soloists, played fabulously, and Maestro Mickelthwate’s judicious pacing and enduring stamina yielded a marvelous performance — one of the Phil’s best to date.

— Lauren Monteiro, for The Oklahoman