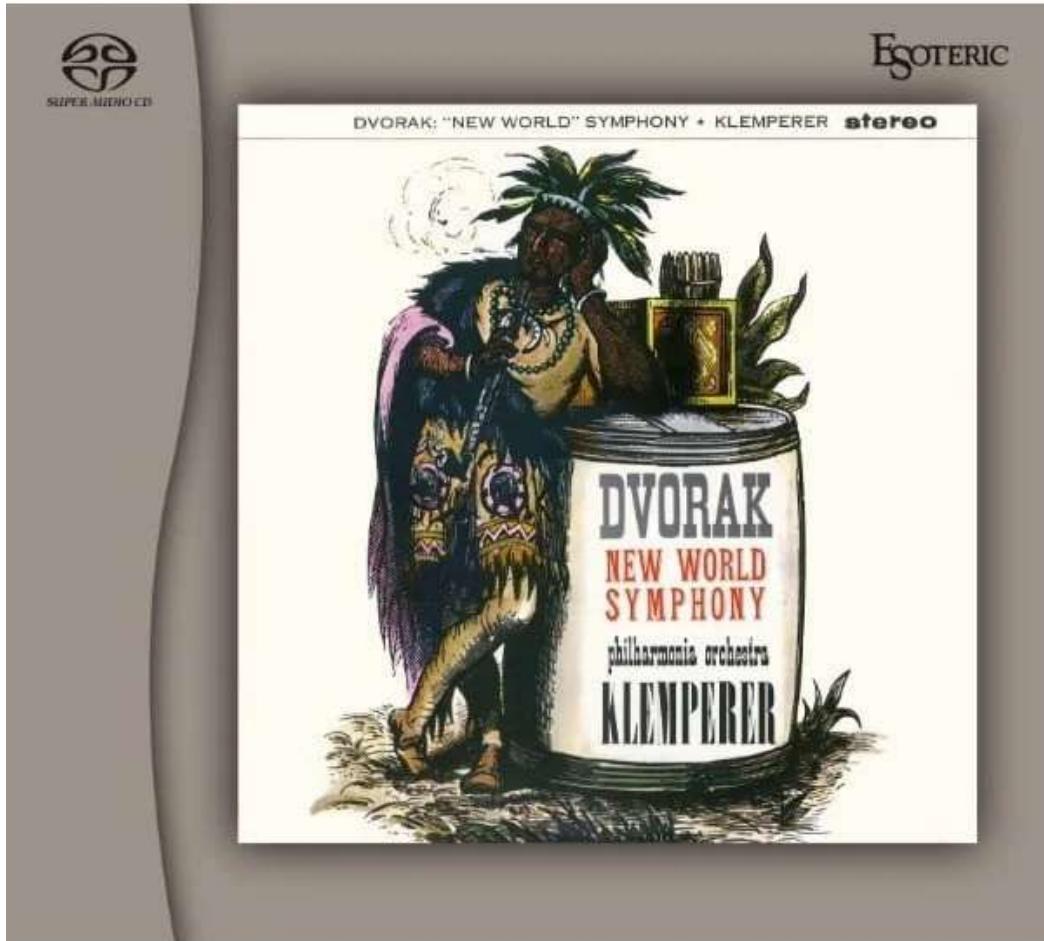


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Dec 6

ESOTERIC Super Audio CD—DVOŘÁK Symphony No. 9 “From the New World”; SCHUBERT Symphony No. 8 “Unfinished”—KLEMPERER



Anthony Kershaw

Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95 “From the New World.”
Symphony No. 8 in B minor, D. 759 “Unfinished”

The great German conductor Otto Klemperer (1885–1973), a leading interpreter of the classical and Romantic Austro-German repertoire including Mahler, Bruckner, Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart, Schubert and Haydn, was known on record primarily for his seminal work with London’s Philharmonia Orchestra. In fact, he was the orchestra’s saviour. During a recording of

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Mahler's *Das Lied Von Der Erde*, yes, that one, *the one* (with Christa Ludwig and Fritz Wunderlich), the orchestral management was summoned during the break at Kingsway, where EMI head honcho Walter Legge folded the orchestra. A remarkable act considering the stature of the orchestra and Dr. Klemperer, let alone EMI Records! The orchestra committee asked Klemperer almost in the next breath, would he carry on as the reorganized orchestra's Music Director? This he did, but now under the name New Philharmonia Orchestra.

Klemperer's famous description of his sometimes volcanic and unpredictable behaviour was that he was an "immoralist". Today, maybe he would have been diagnosed as "on the spectrum". He certainly was affected by severe depression and a bipolar diagnosis for much of his adult life. That said, over the years, he made many exceptional recordings with the Philharmonia.

During my time at school in London, we would hear "stories" about the great man and rehearsal life from such Philharmonia luminaries as Cecil James and Vernon Elliot, the bassoon professors at Trinity. They spoke with much candour, humour, but also great respect for this giant of a musician.



Here we have a departure, much like some of his interesting recordings of Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, and others, this time Dvořák's *Symphony No. 9 "From the New World"* (1893). Although heavily influenced by Brahms, Dvořák offers enough differences and unique qualities, especially the 9th, that this qualifies as a fascinating and unique release. Congrats to ESOTERIC for offering us a superb SA/CD remaster of this masterpiece.

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Once again, as the great Klemperer has surprised me before, he wandered off his beaten path, such as in Stravinsky *Symphony in Three Movements*, Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique* or Tchaikovsky *Symphony No. 4*. Here, his natural musicianship and the wonderful soloists of the Philharmonia Orchestra provide a great New World Symphony.

The original recording was made at Kingsway by Douglas Larter in October/November 1963. I've not heard an original SAX 2554 pressing (no silver/blue, only red semi-circle), but this remaster shows a dynamic gem featuring the glorious acoustics of Kingsway and especially the golden sounds of the woodwinds.

From the famous dolorous introduction, the woodwinds project a serious tone, perfectly blended chords and flawless intonation. And not forgetting the perfect contributions by the great Alan Civil on the French horn.

As the tempos increase in the first movement and in the echt Czech middle section of the wonderful "Scherzo", Klemperer gets a non-Germanic, definitely not four-square, lilt. Wonderful. The two famous TikTok excerpts (my God, over exposed, much?), the English Horn solo and the intense finale are excellent.

My only critique is the timpani sound, which is terribly important but too far back in the mix. ff solos sound anemic. Still, the overall feeling is of a superior performance and dynamite mastering, timps notwithstanding. Interestingly, quieter timpani parts showcase what I call EMI exemplary timpani tone (listen to an EMI/HMV vinyl pressing of Previn's Rachmaninov *Symphony No. 2* for damn near perfect timp sound).

Included as a great bonus is Klemps' famous *Unfinished*. One of the top recordings/performances in a very crowded field

Very highly recommended.

SA/CD press copy kindly provided by ESOTERIC dealer, American Sound.