

Rega ELEX Mk4 integrated amplifier

The ELEX is musical, has a balanced tone, is detailed and it is an all-around winner



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REGA ELEX MK4

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This is a HiFi review of the latest Rega amplifier upgrade to the ELEX integrated amplifier. This is the new Mk4 with a new case to match the wider amplifier range and two new digital inputs into the Rega DAC circuitry. This Mk4 has a MM phono stage and headphone output at the front of the amplifier.

The ELEX Mk4 sits in the middle of the excellent Rega integrated amplifier range above the brilliant Rega **Io** (Winner of an HF&MS Outstanding Award), with 30W/ch into 8 Ω and the **BRIO** (50W/ch) and it looks up to the **ELICIT** (Highly Recommended) with 105W/ch and the stunning **AETHOS** (also a winner of an HF&MS Outstanding Award), with 125W/ch. The **ELEX** Mk4 itself claims 72W/channel of Class A/B muscle in the middle of this impressive range of electronics. The range has continually won HF&MS Outstanding awards (Io and AETHOS) and Highly Recommended awards, though the BRIO predates our awards.



Rega ELEX Mk4 rear with plenty of room



Design

The ELEX Mk4 now has two digital inputs, one TOSLink optical and one co-axial, centred around a Wolfson DAC favoured, interestingly, by Exposure Electronics. The digital platform is kept quite separate from the analogue so as not to compromise the well-regarded Elex signature.

There are additionally four line-level RCA inputs as well as a MM phono input, that is in the ELICIT, at 'Input 1'. Input switching is through a button on the front that cycles through the inputs in order, or on the remote, that switches inputs both ways.

Outputs are to the usual loudspeaker binding posts to the rear; they are substantial and firm. Additionally, there is a 6.35mm (6 ¼ inches) headphone output on the front for ease of use.

Quality

This new Rega casework is lovely to the touch, brushed aluminium I guess, though it is not described. I note the documentation suggests the whole case is a heat sink for the electronics inside. There is a solid touch to the casework and as well as looking like a proper amplifier it feels like it (and it sounds like it too, happily).

There is a remote control, it is a slightly plasticky affair but works for me at this price point and there is nothing to complain about.

The dimensions are (W x H x D) 432mm x 82 x 340 (D includes loudspeaker terminals). In old money, this is 17 x 3.25 x 13.4 inches. The ELEX weighs in at 11kg (or 24.3 lbs). Price; £1,199 in the UK.



Rega ELEX Mk4 is under test with Meze Audio 109 Pro headphones and ELAC Carina loudspeakers (white)

Performance

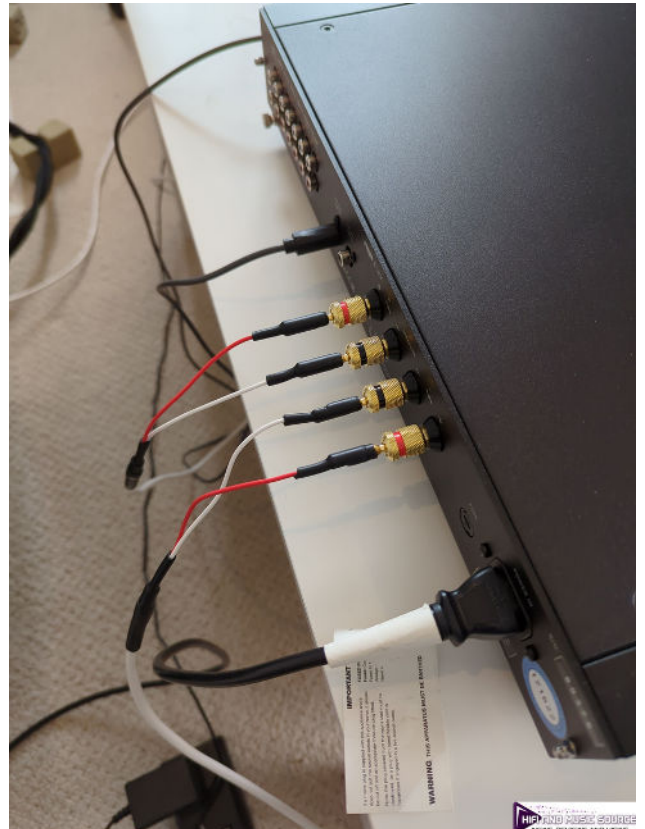
Review Equipment

The ELEX Mk4 has a Vertere power cable (£695, yes, I know, it's half the price of the amplifier) and is driving, mainly, a pair of ELAC Carina bookshelf loudspeakers (£799) that, to me, seem to be a nice pairing. The Carina has a pleasant, controlled not shrill or sibilant, ribbon tweeter. I'm using the excellent Kudos KS-1 speaker cable (£35/mono m) between them.

My sources are variously the Chord Electronics 2Go/2Yu as a streaming digital bridge to the ELEX DAC and I'm using the 2Go/Hugo 2 for analogue input streaming.

I'm using my old Rega RP3 with an Elys2 cartridge in the phono stage of the ELEX.

For listening to the headphone output, I'm using the 'Best of 2022' Meze Audio 109 Pro.



Rega ELEX Mk4 rear with loudspeaker cables

The amplifier is solid, I still love the understated Rega look, and the familial lines give a huge amount of reassurance. I'm not exactly thrashing this amplifier and the 6Ω Carina loudspeakers are cruising along in fine style, there is no real hint of heat particularly and the top is 'normal' to the touch. There's plenty of room at the rear.

The remote is one of those that is best described as "functional". It works fine, it goes quickly to 'Mute' on a phone call, etc, the volume is prompt and works well.

I personally don't mind the front input selection only cycling through the inputs in order, though I note the remote does allow you to go forward and back which is useful if I'm switching from digital to MM Phono Input 1.



...STRAIGHT RCA INPUT YIELDS THAT FRISSON MORE IN THE OUTPUT, CREDIT TO THE ELEX FOR SHOWING IT.



ELAC Carina

At this stage, I'm digital from the 2Go/2Yu into the optical input at the rear of the ELEX.

These ELAC Carina loudspeakers seem to be an excellent match to the ELEX and on its 50th Anniversary, *Dark Side of the Moon* sounds like it was released last week, alongside DJ Stokie and Billie Marten (worth a listen by the way).

The 50th Anniversary *Great Gig in the Sky* (Qobuz, 24-bit, 192kHz), for example, just bristles with energy and of course, this necessitates a run-through of the same track from *Pulse*, with Sam Brown's fabulous lyric, taking the track to the next level.

There are obvious parallels to be drawn to the big brother Elicit Mk5 at £2,000 with more power as outlined above but at the 'normal' sound levels I'm using, barely at 10 o'clock, there is nothing amiss here and the detail and depth in Pink Floyd's Live album *Pulse* (2018 Remaster, Qobuz, 24-bit, 192kHz) is as engaging as required and I would wager a blind test may yield embarrassing results for many.



2Go/Hugo 2 and 2Go/2Yu for analogue and digital testing

On tonality, I feel this amplifier is straight down the line, particularly with this type of loudspeaker, being agile, and easy to drive with the ribbon tweeter. The low-end bass line in the intro to *Sorrow* (2018 Remaster, Qobuz, 24-bit, 192kHz) is mostly there and the ELEX is doing a fine job.

I happily stumble across *Promise*, from Ben Howard's *Every Kingdom* album (Qobuz, 16-bit, 44.1kHz) and the resolution in the guitar at the beginning and the bass control make me look up from my writing as though I had not heard it before. Impressive.

Switching over to the Hugo 2 analogue (with fixed output) and using straight RCA input yields that frisson more in the output, credit to the ELEX for showing it. I have just that fraction more confidence in the DAC performance from the Hugo 2 with a tighter bass presentation, that is clearly there. The best example of this was *Run Like Hell* (Qobuz 24-bit, 192kHz) at the end of *Pulse*. I also feel a clearly cleaner vocal in Lana Del Rey's potty-mouthed track *Did you know that there's a tunnel under Ocean Blvd?* (Qobuz 24-bit, 48kHz).

Musical Interlude with Qobuz

Here's the Musical Interlude playlist, it is the 50th Anniversary of *Dark Side of the Moon* this month hence the heavy influence!



Scan me to see the Rega ELEX Mk4 playlist



HF&MS Rega ELEX Mk4 playlist

Headphones

The headphone output is very satisfactory, killing the speaker output on connection. For me, the output is too loud with both the Beyerdynamic DT900 Pros (at 250Ω) and the HF&MS Best of 2022 Meze Audio 109 Pro (40Ω). However, all of the detail and intimacy you need are available.

MM Phono input

I switch to my trusty Rega RP3 turntable; old, loose, and a little baggy at the seams, but I love it. The Elys2 MM cartridge works well into the MM input, I can't hear any noise in there at these volumes. It is no worse than my modest Musical Fidelity phono stage or the Rega MM Fono I usually use. I would add that Lana Del Rey's *Chemtrails over the Country Club* (Polydor) sounds as good as perfect; fresh, clean, and emotional on vinyl.

Thoughts

At twelve hundred pounds, this is crackers. I would put good money, as a non-betting person, that in a blind test with the recently reviewed ELICIT, at low to moderate volume, you might embarrass yourself in telling them apart. That's not to say the ELICIT is an over-priced version of this ELEX but it will almost certainly deliver better performance at a vigorous party than the ELEX. But in everyday mode, you pay your money and take your choice.

It feels to me as if this is the bargain of the year, already. The main inputs are clean as a whistle, the digital platform performs well and there's a headphone stage here as well as a decent phono stage.

I'd be of the view that if you were starting your HiFi journey, this is probably the place to start. Set your budget, audition a bunch of speakers, buy a Planar 2 or 3 turntable and you're off. Maybe you could add the new NAD CS1 (£299, Chromecast, Bluetooth, etc) as an entry digital streaming option (or the Escape M1 Air at £199, also Chromecast, Bluetooth, etc). Oh, how I wish I was starting again, and was thirty years younger!



THE ELEX IS MUSICAL, HAS A BALANCED TONE, IS DETAILED AND IT IS AN ALL-AROUND WINNER



Overall

The message is clear, this is a superb amplifier at this price, and I cannot recommend it highly enough to an aspiring audiophile looking for a long-term entry point, it is absolutely the definition of an 'Outstanding' award. The ELEX is musical, has a balanced tone, is detailed and it is an all-around winner.

This review coincides with Record Store Day next week, what a gift this would be. There is real value for money with this ELEX, not something you say often in the HiFi industry.

Love

Incredible value for money
Performance
Casework
Understated look

Like

An amplifier to build around
The Remote is functional and responsive
The digital platform is excellent
MM input



Wish

For nothing