

AUDIO
FILE

Desktop/headphone amplifier. Rated at 10W/8ohm
 Made by: Chord Electronics Ltd, Kent
 Supplied by: Chord Electronics Ltd
 Telephone: 01622 721444
 Web: www.chordelectronics.co.uk
 Price: £1300



Chord Anni

Selling for £1300, the Anni isn't Chord Electronics' first compact amplifier – that honour goes to the £2900 TToby [HFN Feb '17], designed as a partner for the Hugo TT 2 DAC/pre/headphone amp [HFN Dec '15]. But the Anni is smaller, at just 16cm wide and 4.25cm tall, much lighter at 625g, and conceptually different.

In practice, its size is governed by its suggested partnership with the compact Qutest DAC [HFN Nov '18] and the Huei phono stage. It's described as a 'Desktop Integrated Amplifier', not just a power amp, and features 6.35mm and 3.5mm headphone outputs on the front panel, along with 4mm speaker sockets to the rear. Either or both headphone sockets can be used, but there's none of the fancy balanced connections found on many another DAC/headphone amp.

Those familiar with Chord's way of thinking will find nothing about

'It's a lot of amplifier crammed into small, high-quality housing'

the Anni to scare the horses. Two of the brand's internally-lit spherical controls handle power on/off and a gain boost, but only to the speaker outputs, if required. That's almost the only switching the user need worry about, beyond selecting between the two sets of line inputs, which is just a matter of pushing

the volume control. There's no remote handset, as this is a desktop product, and therefore intended to be used within easy reach.

The technical information Chord supplies about the Anni is almost as simple as its operation. We're told the power output is 10W/8ohm and the amplification within 'benefits from the company's proprietary ULTIMA circuit topology'. Our independent tests clocked the Anni at 13W/8ohm under dynamic conditions. Either way, there's some sense of this being a lot of amplifier crammed into a small, high-quality housing: both the front and top panels are 'punched' for ventilation, and the Anni can run a little warm if you choose to work it hard.

DESKTOP DIVA

In the absence of a Qutest, the Anni was used with an iFi Audio NEO iDSD DAC/headphone amp [HFN Mar '21] fed from a Mac mini computer via USB and with its analogue output set to fixed-level. The Anni's outputs were run into Neat Acoustics' diminutive Iota loudspeakers, and headphones included Bowers & Wilkins' P9 Signature [HFN Mar '17] and the original – and highly revealing – Focal Spirit Pro [HFN Dec '15].

The amp was also employed in a 'full-size' system powering larger Neat Iota Xplorer speakers [HFN Jul '18]. Now, while it gave a more than reasonable account of itself at levels best described as 'modest to sensible' with an open top-end,

ABOVE: Svelte black alloy case includes two of Chord's iconic illuminated 'ball' switches for gain (speaker output only) and on/standby. Volume control also switches between the two (RCA) line inputs, these joined by inset 4mm banana plug (speaker) sockets and an earth/grounding post. A 15V DC PSU input also feeds a 12V DC output to power Chord's partnering Huei phono preamp

smooth midband and punchy, well-extended bass, it became clear that desktop sound with smaller enclosures was the Anni's true forte, along with its ability to convincingly drive a wide range of headphones.

The clean, smooth but dynamic sound it developed through loudspeakers, complete with generous yet tight bass, was echoed in its headphone performance. Whether with large-scale orchestral music, such as the LSO/Marin Alsop recording of Bernstein's *Candide* [LSO Live LSO0834; DSD128], or the rough-edged Neil Young/Crazy Horse *Barn* set [Reprise download; 192kHz/24-bit], the Anni did not lose its grip. There was a fine sense of insight and detail, but, above all, the impetus of the music-making was delivered intact, which is really what it's all about.

Overall, the sound has a welcome sweetness, along with that low-bass warmth, and while this was true even through the Focal headphones it doesn't mean the Anni is over-tempered. Spin a high-quality recording of simple instruments, such as Margarita Balanas playing the first Saint-Saëns cello concerto [Linn Records CKD 662], and there's plenty of air in the sound. Other headphone amps may throw even more information at you, but the Anni's mix of detail and ease of listening will suit most headphones with which it's used.

VERDICT

Is this a mini-amp with a fine headphone output, or a 'head-fi' design also capable of driving small speakers? However you look at it, Chord's Anni is a great choice for desktop audio with a sound tailored to flatter partnering equipment. ⚡

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

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| Power output (<1% THD, 600/32/8ohm) | 184mW/3385mW/124mW (ph) |
| Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm) | 13W / 20W / 35W / 60W (spkr) |
| Output impedance (20Hz-20kHz) | 450-600mohm (headphone) |
| A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBV/0dBW) | 95.9dB / 81.0dB (headph/spkr) |
| Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, 10mW/32ohm) | 0.0009-0.85% (headphone) |
| Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, 0dBW) | 0.02-5% (speaker) |
| Freq. resp. (20Hz-20kHz/100kHz) | +3.6 to -0.28dB/-4.0dB |
| Power consumption | 10W (1W standby) |
| Dimensions (WHD) / Weight | 160x43x97mm / 0.63kg |