



Desk jockey

As Chord's headline Ultima amplifier tech guest stars in Anni's desktop chassis, **David Vivian** takes a listen

Desktop hi-fi? Can't say I've dabbled. But, of course, 'desktop' is just another marketing category and not a stipulation. Basically, it means small, which is a much more liberating concept and a description that aptly fits Chord Electronics' new integrated amplifier, Anni. With the same dinky form factor and CNC-machined aluminium build as its Qutest DAC (HFC 436) and Huei phono stage (HFC 459), Anni completes a tiny trilogy that, with the addition of Chord's dedicated QSS (Qutest System Stand), can be stacked for an even more Lilliputian footprint.

The star innovation of the company's large, insanely powerful and very expensive flagship Ultima amplifiers is also at Anni's heart. Chord calls it dual-feed-forward error-correction circuit topology. It's clearly scalable and gifts Anni the kind of point of difference its maker is famed for. Naturally, the 'desktop' remit is nailed. That means headphone users are handsomely catered for with 3.5mm and 6.35mm outputs recessed

into the front panel and both can be used at the same time.

Round the back, flush banana plug sockets are used for speaker terminals and flank the two line-level RCA inputs. A four-pin socket accepts the 15V switch mode external power supply and there's 12V DC output for powering the Qutest DAC and Huei phono stage.

Sound quality

The basic facts of spec sheet life are 10W per channel into 8ohm and it's here that Anni pulls its masterstroke. These are 10 of the most energetic and disciplined Watts you're ever likely to encounter that seem to be backed up by copious current delivery and a level of resolution that can more believably create a sense of image solidity and palpable presence than mere power alone. It all allows Anni to slip the bonds of desktop and touch the face of good. Really good.

So naturally, the first thing I do is plug it into my smaller room reference system, which has a Hugo TT2 DAC (HFC 468) at one end and

Audiovector QR5 floorstanders (also HFC 468) at the other. The result isn't so much remarkable as faintly ridiculous. I can't remember the last hi-fi component that made me laugh out loud – in truth, I don't think there's been one. But the disconnect between the Anni's diminutive size and expanse of sonic real estate has a convulsive effect.

Standing down the Hugo TT2 for the more price-appropriate Qutest actually does little to diminish the convincing scale and authority given to Herbert von Karajan's Mahler's 9th on CD or the exquisite transparency and dimensionality of Lunatraktors' *Missing Star* streamed from Tidal. Still more surprising is the low-end weight, body and harmonic richness of Chick Corea's grand piano fluidly negotiating *Monk's Mood* – the immaculately defined dynamic of *Akoustic Band Live* with Corea joined by John Patitucci on bass and Dave Weckl on drums reveals even the faintest micro details. None of it seems plausible. I won't name the acclaimed £3k integrated amp Anni supplants on the kit rack, but in all but ultimate loudness the Chord has its number, displaying the almost uncanny hear-through clarity shared with the big-boy Ultima amps.

Now that's gold star overachievement. Smaller 'desktop compatible' bookshelf loudspeakers are therefore a walk in the park, the headphone performance beyond exemplary. A desktop amp, yes, but one composed almost entirely of superpowers.

Conclusion

Intriguingly, Chord Electronics' publicity blurb speaks of teaming the Anni with compact loudspeakers in a small room scenario whereas, in the user manual, the claim is that it will drive any speaker. I'd only add 'within reason'. To regard Anni as a desktop accessory is to seriously under estimate this brilliant little integrated. Enthusiastically recommended ●

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Chord Electronics Anni

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
Desktop integrated amplifier

WEIGHT
625g

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
160 x 43 x 97mm

FEATURES
● Quoted power output: 2x 10W (8ohm)
● 2x RCA line inputs
● 3.5mm/6.35mm headphone outputs

DISTRIBUTOR
Chord Electronics Ltd.

WEBSITE
chordelectronics.co.uk

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★★

LIKE: Small size; build quality; design; standard-setting sonics

DISLIKE: No remote, since it can be used as a conventional amp

WE SAY: Desktop royalty, maybe, but Anni is better than that

OVERALL

