

Chord Mojo

Audiophile Gem



Chord Mojo

A little over one month ago, completely out of the blue, I received some exciting news from Chord Electronics. All of a sudden there was the Mojo, a tiny but beautifully built gadget that - as the new entry level model of the range of portable DAC/headphone amps by the British brand - had a price that was so far under the superb Chord Hugo that it made me wonder how close the performance of this Chord Mojo (which stands for Mobile Joy, by the way) would actually be, compared to the Hugo. I received one of the two very first samples that were available in The Netherlands and subjected it to a close and thorough scrutiny over the last few weeks.

With the Hugo, that was put on the market in the summer of 2014, Chord hit the bullseye more than once as far as I was concerned. Not only was it (and still is) the best sounding portable DAC/headphone amp I ever heard, but it's liquid, almost tube-like character also made it a very good stationary DAC in a full-blown high-end system. This spring, the Hugo was joined by the overwhelmingly good but rather costly Hugo TT, which is designed mainly for desktop use. That seemed to wrap up the range, but apparently Chord had another ace up it's sleeve.



Inside and Out

The first thing you notice when you open Mojo's nice little white box is that it contains just the Mojo and a short USB to USB micro cable. That's it, not even a manual (which can be found online of course, just click [here](#) and no adapters for Apple or Android phones or tablets. You have to go out and buy your own Apple USB Camera Adapter or Android USB OTG cable. Besides that, the Mojo is a classic example of 'Less Is More'. It's operation is so straightforward that you really don't need a manual - save for a few little details, but more about that later...

There are only three buttons. Three brilliant buttons by the way, because closer inspection reveals that they are actually little balls made of frosted glass, that you can easily move in their setting by turning them around with your finger, with the actual buttons and multicolor LED's hidden beneath. Like this, you get that 'in a glance' overview of it's volume setting and cur-



rent sampling frequency. If you want to, you can dim them by giving the two volume buttons one short, simultaneous push. Another simultaneous push will recover the original brightness. The LED's do not switch off completely when you use the Mojo, except when you turn the volume all the way down, but as far as I have found, that hardly has any impact on battery life.

Even though the Mojo is designed mainly for mobile use, many (future) buyers will be delighted to hear that it's also possible to use it as a stationary DAC on your computer. However, it is important to know that the Mojo will always take it's power from the internal battery. The USB Data input is not capable of receiving the usual 5V USB power, because if it did it would gobble up the battery power in your mobile device way too fast. In the same way, the separate USB charging input is not connected to the digital circuitry in the Mojo. So if you use just one cable and connect that to the charging input, the Mojo will not appear in the list of available audio devices in your computer. That's why you need two cables for stationary use: one to keep the battery full, and one to transport your digital data. The good part is that, like this, power and data are kept separate, and the cable you use for charging can be the simplest one you have lying around. The transport of digital data, however, will benefit greatly from a better cable. When you use the Mojo in a desktop setup or in a hifi-set, you can set the output to line level. To do this, you have switch the Mojo on, and while the on/off button is showing you it's entire sequence of colours, you press both volume buttons simultaneously, until they turn blue. This volume setting is not kept in

memory by the Mojo, so when you want to take it out for portable use you can regain full volume control by switching it off and on again.

For a more 'in-depth' description of Mojo's technological features, click [here](#).



Listening to the Chord Mojo

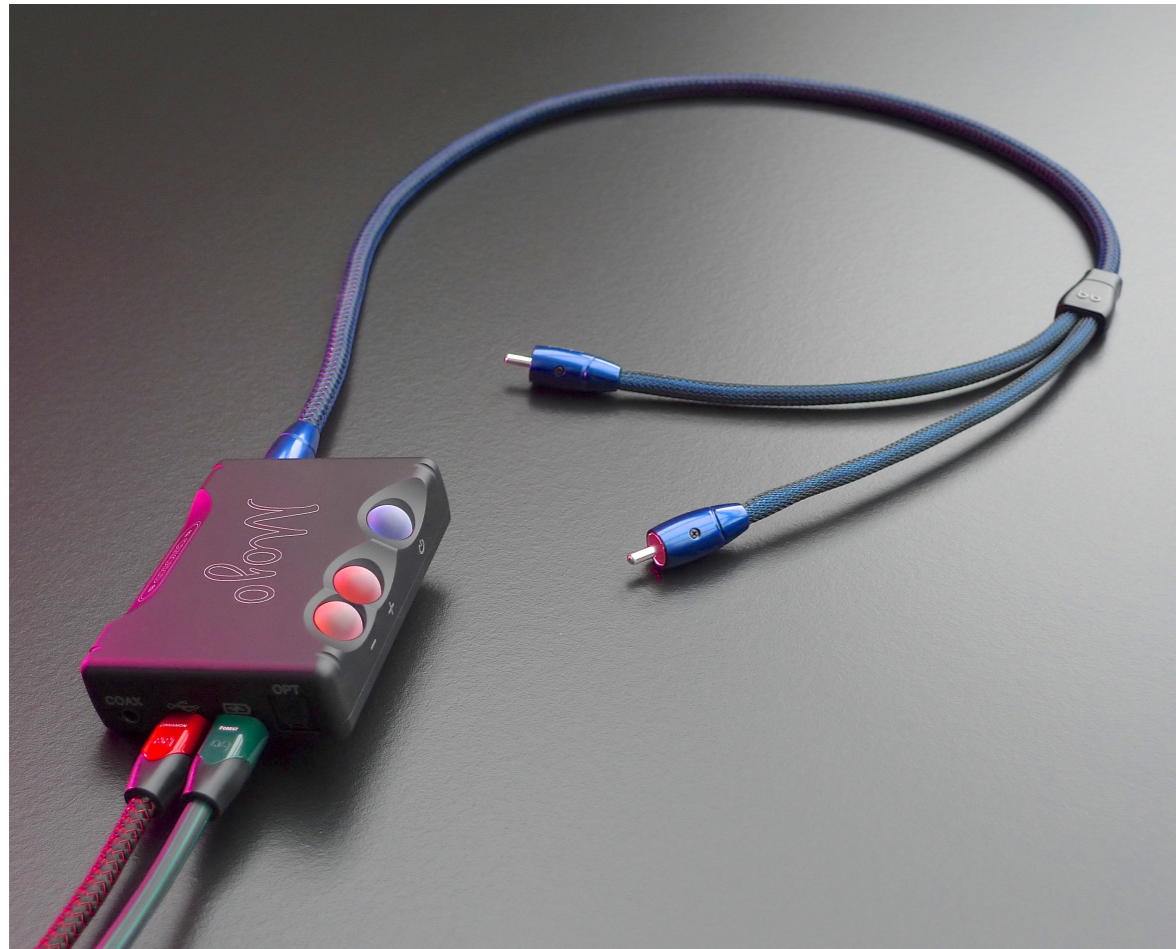
After a delightfully short charging cycle I connected the Mojo to my iPhone 6. The Apple Camera Adapter and the short USB cable that came with the Mojo are a little bit rigid, so I expect there will be some minor logistic problems in tight inside pockets, but sitting at my desk with both the phone and the Mojo in front of me it worked just fine. Headphone on duty was the fantastic AudioQuest Nighthawk, that is mostly aimed at home use. Using the Onkyo HF Player App on the iPhone (and without the Mojo) I listened to the album Late Night Tales by Nils Frahm. That's the latest album in a series where different artists create a sort of 'mixtape' to let us hear which music has influenced them. I have quite a few of them in my collection, but this one by Nils Frahm really takes the biscuit when it comes to atmosphere. Now the AudioQuest Nighthawk was specifically designed to be easy to drive, but that does not mean that a run off the mill source like the iPhone 6 will suffice to really make it sing. That became obvious when I entered the Mojo



into the equation. My goodness... The improvement was stunning. Spatial imaging got better, there was a lot more control and texture in the low frequencies, voices were more intelligible and high-frequency details got that sumptuous smoothness that I also loved in the Chord Hugo. The Mojo was no slouch on the drive front either. The improved 'inner pressure' of the sound made it so lifelike that every now and then I got the feeling (and yes, I'm really saying this) that I was listening to a pair of good floor standing loudspeakers.

Baffled by so much quality I decided to raise the stakes and set up the Mojo as the main DAC in my big system downstairs, using my dedicated Mac mini with Audirvana+ software as a streamer, and an AudioQuest Big Sur interconnect to feed the output of the Mojo to my amplifier. The short USB Micro cable that you get from Chord proved to be 'not bad', but it's limited length made it a bit awkward in use. Fortunately I had a longer standard quality USB micro cable lying around. That one sounded 'okay' as well, but when I moved it to the charging input of the Mojo and started using an AudioQuest Cinnamon Micro USB for the digital data, the improvement was

almost as big as when I switched from 'iPhone' to 'iPhone plus Mojo'. The Cinnamon brought more low-end grip, less stress, brighter tonal colors and more dynamics. But most importantly: the fluid, almost tube-like highs put their spell on me again.



At first I listened 'battery only', so no power cable attached to the charging input, and I am happy to report that this configuration had absolutely no beneficial effect on sound quality. To put the Mojo through one final torture test I listened to the great album Extras In A Movie by the American band Papadosio. Their music is an exciting, genre-defying blend of many styles, including Progressive Rock, Electronic, pure Pop and Psychedelica. This adventurous and superbly recorded mix made for a nice aural trip. This is where the Mojo proved that it is capable of much more than just sophistication. When called upon to really let it rip, it dived in head first. The amounts of dynamics and grunt that came out of this tiny box were quite unexpect-

ted, almost besting my reference DAC, the NAD M51. Even when the music got really full and complex, the Mojo showed an excellent ability to keep track. Better than what can be expected from a DAC in its price-range, so I can full heartedly credit Chords youngest for its very mature behavior.

So...

Where would I position the Mojo in the ever expanding landscape of portable USB da-converters under and up to 1000 euros? To me, from what I heard, it is obvious that it is in the highest league. It's all a matter of taste of course, but I simply adore that transparent and sophisticated reproduction of high frequencies, and the colourful and powerful mids and lows. The good people at Chord really know how to build a great DAC. I already knew that, of course, but with the Mojo they really surpass themselves in the 'bang for the buck' department. I'll agree that there is quite a bit less functionality, but when you only compare it's musical performance it gets pretty darn close to the Hugo. For only about one-third of the price. Go figure...



Extra information

For more information about the Chord Mojo portable DAC headphone amp, please visit our art`s excellence webstore:

Chord Mojo

Spotify



Nils Frahm - Late Night Tales
Papadosio - Extras In A Movie

Tidal



Nils Frahm - Late Night Tales
Papadosio - Extras In A Movie



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