

Chord Electronics Mojo+Poly portable DAC and Server/Streamer

by Alan Sircom



Chord Electronics' popular Mojo DAC gained a new ally in the Poly add-on server, streamer, multi-tool thingy. People are nicknaming it 'Mojopoly' because once you screw the Poly into the Mojo, the two go together so well they might as well be a single entity. I know Chord is a bit 'non-plussed' with the Mojopoly portmanteau, but in fact it's a sign of just how much positivity there is toward this device. Sorry, these devices.

Mojo is already a done deal; it won big in our 2016 Awards. The little pack-of-Lucky-Strikes sized battery powered DAC would –

in most companies – be the best engineered, best sounding product in the line-up, but Chord has the Hugo2 and the DAVE (and now the Qutest) to show it a clean(ish) set of heels. But we're not here to talk about the Mojo. It's the Poly and then the Mojo+Poly combination that are important. And if the Mojo broke new ground, the Mojo+Poly are the portable audio world's Krakatoa!

Chord is apt to use some fairly cutesy (Qutsey?) names, but Poly fits well. It adds numerous ways to serve and stream music, and as its designed to plug into that best-loved portable DAC, Poly was designed from the get-go to live in the portable audio space, controlled by your smartphone. Where the Mojo was essentially a wired digital device in an increasingly wireless world, the Poly was never going to need a wired safety net. Poly slots into the digital connection side of the Mojo. The Poly has its own battery and the single remaining Micro-USB slot on the Poly simultaneously charges both devices. This means battery charging takes four hours to fully charge both devices, and the Poly runs out of steam after about nine hours, or roughly an hour before the Mojo.



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There are a lot of DLNA-friendly alternative control point programs that will fill the gap in the app by Chord. Some (like Plex) are paid, others free. I’ve had some success with Linn’s Kinsky, MyAudioStream, and PlugPlayer (although this seems to have disappeared without a trace recently) on iOS, and BubbleUPnP for Android.

The other weird thing about the world post-iDevice is ‘personal dual inventory’ in consumer electronics seems very out-dated. People don’t carry an iPod anymore because there’s an app for that on the iPhone. They don’t carry a compact camera for the same reason. So, the idea of carrying a Micro-SD card reading server that runs alongside but independently to your smartphone seems like a step backwards in time. But, then you hear just how good it sounds, and you can almost hear that switch flip in your head. Instead of being an extra box to take on the tasks your phone can already do, music on your smartphone becomes outmoded, compromised by the limitations of being just another app on a phone. The dedicated operation of the Mojo+Poly makes a vast amount of sense almost immediately. The fact you can also switch between data stored on the Poly to streamed content fed from your phone is merely more of the same wonderfulness!

This is not a small perception shift; it makes you include a Mojo+Poly as a part of your everyday pocket roll-out. Keys, wallet, smartphone, Mojo+Poly, IEMs... let’s go! And like before with the Mojo as a standalone, the Mojo+Poly unlock a range of headphones and IEMs that would struggle to gain acceptance being played through a smartphone alone. The quieter backgrounds and more precise gain structure mean sensitive IEMs are not a problem, for example.

▶ Poly soaks up the Mojo’s lone Micro-USB digital input, meaning if you connected your Mojo direct to your smartphone via an OTG cable or an iKludge (Lightning to USB, then USB to Micro-USB), you are out of luck. This is probably not a problem, however, as Poly brings a host of wire-free communication protocols to the table. Where Mojo was limited to that one Micro-USB slot, Mojo+Poly can speak to the world via Apple AirPlay or Bluetooth, and better yet can treat your phone as a DLNA server, streaming music stored on the phone, or online streamed music sources like Tidal and Spotify. It also comes with a little Micro-SD card slot, so it can be its own music server. In both these cases, the smartphone also takes on the task of DLNA player. OK, so AirPlay and DLNA aren’t on speaking terms (thanks to Apple’s deep-seated ‘not invented here’ syndrome), but there are a number of apps that can work as a DLNA-chummy player on your phone.

This brings us to the one missing piece of the jigsaw... Chord’s own GoFigure app to control the Poly. This was shown in beta form at the Poly’s launch, and – as we go to press – remains in late beta. We held this review back for as long as we could, on the promise of being the first to test it with the app in place, but early January saw Aussie ‘flu and CES push the app’s launch back to past our publication date. We will run a follow-up review of the app and how it affects setting up the Poly as soon as we get that final version of the app. With the aforementioned app, setting up a DLNA network with the Poly as either renderer or combined renderer/server should be easy, requiring only a pin-press on the Poly while the rest of the process is automated. At the moment, the process is more convoluted. In fact, it highlights exactly why the audiophile computer/portable revolution really didn’t take off until this decade, because without some kind of ‘automagical’ on-screen set-up on an app, Poly suddenly casts us back to an unthinkable time without smartphones. Those of us with some miles on the odometer might scoff at younger generations and their inability to perform even basic tasks without their smartphone; by making the installation a little more ‘hands on’ and a little less ‘app-based’, you discover that us Gen X’ers and Baby Boomers are just as bad!



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TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: add-on battery powered wireless streamer/server for Chord Mojo DAC

Inputs: Bluetooth A2DP and Wi-Fi 2.4GHz, x Micro SD card slot

Play time: 9+ hrs

Charging: <4 hours, 2-amp Micro USB input. Both Mojo and Poly can be simultaneously charged via Poly's Micro USB

Playback support: Roon, DNLA, AirPlay and Bluetooth playback

DLNA server and renderer: SMB Server (SD card); MPD player (SD Card)

Integrated Access Point: allows configuration of connected networks (up to 32)

Hotspot mode: Poly can create its own hotspot where networks/devices/countries don't support tethering

Files supported: ACC, WAV, FLAC, AIFF, OGG VORBIS, ALAC, WMA and MP3

PCM sample rates: 44.1kHz, 48kHz, 88.2kHz, 96kHz, 176.4kHz, 192kHz, 358.8kHz, 384kHz, 717.6kHz and 768kHz

DSD via DoP sample rates: DSD64 – DSD256 (Quad-DSD); DSD from SD card

Dimensions (WxHxD): 6.2x2.2x5cm

Price: £499 (Mojo £399)

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▶ Discussing sound quality is a done deal. I refer you back to Chris Martens' review of the Mojo in Issue 132. Nothing has changed, right down to the format options (if you can squirt them wirelessly or load them onto a Micro-SD card, they will play through the Poly). “Organic, natural, and authoratative” said Chris Martens, and he's right. “Slightly warmer than the Hugo,” he said, and he's right about that, too. In short, the intensely listenable and enjoyable qualities of the Chord Mojo are retained in the Mojo+Poly. Since the launch of the Mojo, it has remained unchallenged as the benchmark for portable audio digital conversion at the price and way beyond. The Mojo+Poly simply integrate perfectly to deliver that articulate, hugely entertaining, and naturally rhythmic sound of the Mojo with greater flexibility. All that you lose is the USB cable.

I am struggling to find a downside here, especially when the GoFigure app makes installation less of a 'faff'. In essence, if you liked the Chord Mojo, you probably own a Chord Mojo, and now you need a Chord Poly to go with it. I guess in an ideal world, I'd want some kind of thinner case (the standard and leather versions are great, but add a little bulk to the sleek 'MojoPoly' look), and I think the battery indicators could be rolled into the illuminated buttons of the Mojo, as the standard ones are difficult to see (perhaps GoFigure will have some kind of communication to show remaining battery power on your phone). But right now, the only real limitation is that lack of app, and once set-up, it's easy to be over that and running with a different crew (of apps).

There are few 'done deals' in audio, but the Chord Mojo+Poly is just that. Once you begin to get just why the Poly is so useful, the excellent Mojo becomes almost redundant without its partner. Poly is Starsky to Mojo's Hutch, Wallace to Mojo's Gromit, Woody to Mojo's Buzz Lightyear. You get my drift; basically once the Poly clicked into place next to Mojo, there was never going to be a time where Mojo was seen out on its own again. Not because of some kind of hidden failing on the part of Mojo, but because Poly simply makes the Mojo so much more than just a DAC. You will use a MicroSD card, and you will fill it with high-res files, and you will wonder how you ever listened to music on the move without the Poly. It really is that good. Headphone users of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your wires! +