

# DACs

Does a separate digital-to-analogue converter *really* make that much difference? Oh yes

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## ■ Chord Qute £1195

**Chord claims that** its latest and most affordable mains-powered DAC is the 'world's most advanced', and as it stands here as our DAC Product of the Year, it's hard to argue with that statement.

The Qute's name seems a natural one for a successor to the excellent 2Qute (which won the Award at this price point in 2015, 2016 and 2017), and it justifies it. That's not wholly surprising considering it's largely based on another 2018 Award winner, the Hugo 2.

It uses the same DAC architecture, software coding and frequency-shaping filters, but ditches the headphone amplifier and rechargeable Li-on batteries that make the Hugo 2 portable.

The Qute's sole purpose is to be the digital-to-analogue bridge between your digital source and amplifier, and is no more lacking in either features or performance than a Swiss Army knife.

The journey from the 2Qute to Qute hasn't altered the overall sonic character, which is crisp, clean, concise - not to mention explicitly detailed. In 2015 we

complimented the 2Qute for its "almost effortlessly cohesive and musical sound", and thankfully those qualities haven't been lost in transition.

But the Qute offers more resolution here, and its presentation is slightly bigger and more spacious too, giving musical elements greater scope to evolve without bumping into each other.

### Dynamic excellence

We play Peter Broderick's *Eyes Closed And Traveling*, and there's a new dynamic facility to our system. The piano piece is an exhibition of Broderick's ability to shift from delicate to devastating within a few strikes of the keys, and the Qute faithfully conveys the undulating dynamics, clocking the sudden surges as well as the subtler simmerings.

Notes have crisper leading edges, carry warmth and texture in abundance, and never decay prematurely - even when forthcoming notes tumble over the top.

Timing is that bit tighter too, which helps the Qute sniff out a rhythmic

Another in the lengthening line of transformative, realistically priced DACs from Chord

structure when one comes its way, no matter what the genre. It's as happy rocking out to tumultuous tunes as it is rolling with classical compositions.

The Qute is very Chord-like with its colour-denoting buttons, which glow white for USB Type-B (capable of accepting 32-bit/768kHz PCM/DSD512); yellow for the first BNC coaxial and red for the second (24-bit/384kHz); green for the optical (24-bit/192kHz/DSD64).

The two coaxial inputs can also be used in dual-data mode, allowing the Qute to handle (upsampled) 768kHz files from Chord's Blu Mk2 CD transport.

Whichever input path you choose, the output is through a pair of RCAs. Chord anticipates the Qute being paired with a wide range of pre-amplification, so has made the output stage variable - you can select 1V (red), 2V (green) or 3V (blue).

Chord continues to light up the premium market for DACs, and the Qute is the proof. It's the product that lesser rivals look up to at this price mark - and our favourite of the year.