



Pitch perfect?

WHEN CHRIS FRANKLAND HEARD WHISPERS OF A STREAMER THAT WAS IMPRESSING SOME STAUNCH ANALOGUE SUPPORTERS, HE HAD TO FIND OUT WHAT MADE THE 432 EVO STANDARD SO SPECIAL

For those of us brought up with the best that analogue could offer, it is difficult to get excited about streaming. And with good reason, because it usually sounds worse. But when a retailer friend of mine with similar views called me to say he had found a streamer that made him completely reassess his poor opinion of them, I was all ears.

The streamer was from Belgian audiophile music server specialist 432 Evo and the model we have here is its entry-level Standard music server.

Never heard of 432 Evo? To be honest, neither had I. It was founded in 2013 by parent company Klinkt Beter, which is a Linux and network security consultancy with 20 years' experience working in high-security environments. This, combined with a passion for high-end audio, led to 432 Evo.

Klinkt Beter was also a retailer of high-end audio in the Benelux countries and had become dissatisfied with the quality of streamers it was demonstrating. Believing those streamers were based on outdated software or outsourced OEM software, it decided to launch its own music servers with in-house written software.

There are four models: the Standard, reviewed here, the High End, the Aeon and the Master. The £2649 Standard uses the motherboard's USB output to connect to a DAC; the £4249 High End and £5799 Aeon have a dedicated USB output card, while the Aeon and £14,000 Master have a superclock-driven USB output, with more refined software. All use a separate, high-quality Sbooster BOTW MkII linear power supplies, which 432 Evo believes is one of the best on the market, with low voltage drop, a high-quality transformer and a high-quality DC cable.

But before getting into the minutiae of the formats and platforms it supports, it is time to face

the elephant in the room – 432Hz tuning. This is at the very core of the company's design philosophy.

It refers to the tuning reference for music, which today has been standardised at 440Hz – or A above Middle C – known as the Stuttgart Pitch. 432 Evo points out that, in the past, the tuning frequency was typically lower, but that it rose over the years to increase the apparent loudness. Later it was suggested that 432Hz might be a better pitch for orchestras and indeed Stradivarius violins are said to have been built to be in tune at 432Hz.

432 Evo says they were inspired by Dutch composer Geert Huinink, who decided to use 432Hz. And so the company organised focus groups to carry out comparisons of 440Hz and 432Hz and discovered that 58 out of 60 listeners thought 432 sounded better. 432 Evo suggests the sound is "warmer, more pleasing, more like analogue and more relaxing compared with the sharper 440Hz". I could hardly wait to try it!

With that explanation out of the way, and I will get around to auditioning 432Hz tuning later, let's look at what you get for your £2,649. Well, one thing you could get is an iPad to control it, for an all-in price of £3,000. And if you don't already have one, this is an option well worth going for, because the initial set-up will already have been done for you by the importer and/or retailer, with the installation of Roon Core and the Vortexbox local control system



Specifications

432 Evo Standard

Type	Music server
Price	£2649
Internal storage	2TB
Networking	Ethernet
Inputs	Two USB 3.0 ports for external drives
Outputs	Two USB 2.0 ports for USB DACs
Dimensions (WxHxD)	
Main unit	435x69x325mm
power supply	240x75x130mm

432evo.be

(accessed through your browser), which gives the user access to all of the settings, including live on-the-fly switching between 432Hz and 440Hz tuning and 10 custom upsampling filters.

Good to go

Your 432 Evo Standard thus equipped is ready to rock and roll. and should work straight out of the box, requiring only that you sign up to Roon, well worth it as it is an excellent piece of control and library management software. You will also need a subscription to a suitable music provider, such as Tidal or Qobuz.

As well as 2TB of internal SSD storage with SATA noise filtering, the Standard comes with custom remote-supported Linux and a built-in 'bit-perfect' TEAC CD ripper. Input to the streamer is via an Ethernet cable and output to your DAC via USB or HDMI. It supports common file formats, including WAV and FLAC at resolutions up to 32bit/768kHz, while the Roon implementation also supports DSD64, DSD128, DSD256 and DSD512,

The Listening

I hooked the 432 Evo up to a Pro-Ject PreBox RS2 Digital DAC, which was connected through my Audio Note Meishu Tonmeister amp to AN-J LX Hemp speakers, with a Chord Company Signature USB cable to connect the server to the DAC.

My listening was split into three. First, I just listened to it in my system before comparing it with anything. Then I compared it with the much cheaper, but excellent, Pro-Ject Stream Box Ultra S2 streamer at £629. If it couldn't beat that, it would be a non-starter. Then I put it up against an Innuos Zenith Mk3 streamer, which with 2TB storage retails at £3,999.

At the importer's suggestion, output upsampling filters were disabled – at which point I should note I have rarely heard upsampling do a whole lot of good for sound quality. Similarly, DAC output resolution was set to 16bit/44.1kHz and 'internal precision' to '1x output resolution'.

Initial impressions – set at 440Hz tuning to start with – playing a few favourite tracks from Tidal were excellent. Hitherto, the sound from most streamers I have used has been disappointing, but when I listened to 'Groovin' from guitarist Peter White's excellent album of that name, I sat up and took notice. Here was inner detail on his play and dynamics and rhythmic structure I'd not previously heard so compellingly conveyed on a streamer. A favourite Ben Sidran track proved its credentials on vocals with a very impressive performance as well as good body, dynamics and pitch on piano.

The 432 Evo definitely had my attention! Time to pitch it against the excellent, but much cheaper Pro-Ject. Well, Dave at importers Whole Note

Distribution, can rest easy, as the 432 Evo wasted no time in showing the cheaper pretender a clean pair of heels, perhaps as one might hope.

On Ben Sidran's 'Easy Street', from *Old Songs for the New Depression*, the 432 Evo conveyed the body, power and dynamics of his piano playing far better, and his vocals were more open, articulate and – well – just more 'human'. The bass line had more weight, control and tunefulness: the bass via the Pro-Ject may have been 'bigger', but it was rather overblown and lacked real control.

On a favourite track from guitarist Larry Carlton's *Sleepwalk*, the 432 Evo triumphed again with much better voicing of his guitar, with tighter and more tuneful bass lines and more syncopated, detailed and delicate drums/percussion.

So, with that hurdle cleared with some degree of ease, the time came time to try the 432 Evo Standard against the Innuos, and sax ace Dave Koz's 'Honey Dipped', from his *Saxophonic* album, to my ears the 432 Evo conveyed the subtleties and power of Koz's playing more coherently, while percussion was more syncopated and structured.

On 'Build Me Up From Bones' from Sarah Jarosz's excellent album of the same name, I felt the 432 conveyed her mandolin in a more natural manner than the Innuos, which I also felt was more forward with its presentation. Subtle violin and cello detail in the background was also better conveyed

Yes, the Innuos did perhaps create more space around her vocals, but undoubtedly the sweetness and sheer coherence of the 432 was winning me over. Don't get me wrong – both the Innuos and 432 Evo performed well, but for me, the latter was more musically persuasive, more subtle in its musical presentation and a little less forward.

And that 432Hz tuning thing?

Now, what of that 432Hz tuning? Well, the jury is out, I think, because my reactions varied. On one Ben Sidran track I liked what 432 did for his vocals and piano, with 440 sounding a bit less nimble on the bass line, whereas on a Dave Koz sax track I felt the bass had better movement on 440 and the sound was snappier. On a couple of Peter White tracks, percussion seemed more sharply focused on 432 and yet the sound was crisper on 440. Horses for courses, I think, so you'll have to make up your own mind. Both sounded great, though.

It was a bit like that with the digital filters. You'd struggle to separate them on sound, but Linear Phase Slow Roll Off and Archimago Imp + Evo Stage 2 seemed the best of the bunch. But the differences were subtle, so don't lose any sleep over it!

Simply, the 432 Evo Standard puts in a stellar performance and deserves a serious audition.