

Home Theater Receivers

A versatile new generation is full of surprises



Paul Squillo

In previous articles, I've shared my expertise from decades in the audio field. This month, my news is hot off the presses. I recently attended a virtual seminar on Yamaha's new line of entry-level surround receivers: the 7.2 channel RX-V6A and the 5.2 channel RX-V4A. The myriad of things that a starter receiver can do these days with both music and movies just blew my mind! Today, I'll give you a peek into how versatile this new generation of home theater receivers can be.

The Basics

These Yamahas are both surround receivers. The RX-V6A has 7.2 channels, with the ability to hook up to a pair of front speakers, a center speaker, a pair of front height speakers (for Dolby Atmos or DTS-X), surround speakers to your sides, surround rears behind you, and up to two subwoofers. Additionally, you can run a pair of speakers by wires to a second location and play something completely different in another room. The RX-V4A has 5.2 channels (no surround rears, and no second zone or height channels).

You can hook up a latest-technology 8K UHD TV to them both, and they will also be fast enough to accommodate video gaming.

Yamaha also upgraded how well these receivers reproduce music, but I've come to expect that from them. Plus, for all you hipsters, the RX-V6A also adds a place to

hook up your record player.

Here's Where the Fun Starts

1. Internet radio. If you've always had trouble picking up FM off your antenna, just hook this receiver to the same network that you use for your computer via an ethernet cable or WiFi. You'll instantly have easy access to the world of internet radio, with perfect reception and no weird antenna placement. From a hundred thousand stations worldwide, you're certain to find many favorites. My top find is a wonderful jazz station from the Ukraine! Setup was easy. You actually operate this with Yamaha's free MusicCast app, from your smart phone or tablet. Very cool!

2. Internet music services. If that's not personal enough for you, Yamaha gives you easy access to many online music services that allow you to choose a type of music and create your own radio station, choose from tens of millions of songs to play on demand, choose from well-constructed playlists, or create your own. A lifetime's worth of music is free, or if you want commercial-free service, you can pay a small fee. Tidal and Qobuz have many recordings that are high resolution, with noticeably higher fidelity than your best CD. One of these music services, Deezer, offers ways for you to add your own personal music to the internet as well.

3. Bluetooth, both ways. So far, I use my Bluetooth to wirelessly hook the music in my phone to my music system. It works from up to 100 feet away! Or use it to hook up wireless headphones, so you can play your music or movies without disturbing anyone else in the house.

4. Multi-room music. The MusicCast



Yamaha speakers.

system available in many Yamaha products is a great way to fill your whole home with music, using either a single speaker or a stereo pair in each room. With no holes to drill or wires to run, it's perfect for music-minded apartment dwellers. The MusicCast app on your phone or tablet can operate your whole house. These receivers are also Airplay 2 compatible, if you prefer Apple's approach to multi-room.

5. Voice control. Alexa, Google Assistant, and Siri can be added to talk to your receiver, for hands-free control.

6. Automatic Room Calibration. Each room has its unique set of acoustical problems, creating echoes and resonances that completely undo the virtues of even the most exotic audio system. Yamaha's YPAO calibration has always been regarded as one of the better methods, getting consistently good results.

7. Compressed Music Enhancer. MP3 recordings throw out too much data to sound refined on a great system. Until you replace all your MP3 recordings with at least CD quality, make sure to turn on the Compressed Music Enhancer, and give some punch and sparkle back to these recordings.

More Features Than Ever

So many of these features are things that we have long wished for. Nearly infinite music access and simple operation are striking ways to enjoy your stereo more

than ever before. And these are the entry level receivers! I am ever more amazed by how much you get for your money these days, and how much better the equipment sounds.

When I left Fairfield in 1991, surround receivers were not yet ready for prime time, so it took separate amps, a preamp, and a \$1,000 surround decoder to build a musical surround system. Digital movies were years away, DVD wasn't invented yet, and the beginnings of HD video were still a decade off. Back then it cost tens of thousands of dollars to design and install a system that could fill a whole house with music, and even more to have elaborate remote control.

Today, when you climb past the entry-level products, you'll see that not every company gives you all of the features above. In fact, by the time you get to high-end receivers and separates, their menus and displays may actually be quite primitive in comparison. Giving them higher performance on music may sacrifice some useful features. When you choose your receiver, make sure that it has the special features that will serve you best. I suggest that you be willing to give up a feature or two for the sake of more refined musical performance. That, after all, will continue to give you joy long after your excitement for the gadgets fades away.

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