



Yamaha R-N402 MusicCast

The allure of network-capable devices has never been stronger, bolstered by the accelerating migration from physical media to hard disc/server-stored music data, the availability of more and more quality streaming services, and the ever improving availability of fast data access.

The Yamaha R-N402 is a network receiver that makes it easy to access music from a variety of sources. More specifically, it combines the role of a traditional stereo receiver (yes, it has an FM/AM tuner on board) with the ability to access music from networked and on-line sources.

There's something reassuringly familiar about the Yamaha's smart but functional styling. The centrally located alphanumeric display is clear and legible (but could have been a bit bigger), while the switchgear is logically arranged, and exudes an air of chunky solidity.

The rear panel isn't as densely populated as one might expect, given the extended list of sources the Yamaha can access.

From an analogue perspective, the receiver offers three dedicated stereo line inputs, together with a full recording loop.

Then there's a choice of optical or coaxial digital inputs, while the Ethernet socket (and the Wi-Fi antenna) confirm networking capability. Less obvious is the R-N402's ability to accept music streams via Bluetooth and AirPlay.

There's also integrated support for streaming services such as Qobuz, Juke, Spotify and Napster, but sadly, none of those are relevant to South African consumers. The good news is that Tidal will be added to that list via a free firmware update in July.

For now, you can access the literally thousands of Internet radio stations, including the excellent Radio Paradise, Naim Radio and more.

Last but not least, there's MusicCast, Yamaha's multiroom system that allows collective sharing of all sources by all MusicCast-compatible devices on the same network.

The Yamaha supports most of the mainstream audio file formats, including WAV, AIFF, FLAC, ALAC, MP3 and WMA. A welcome surprise is compatibility with DSD files in 2,8 MHz and 5,6 MHz forms.

The Yamaha was hooked up to our studio network using Ethernet (still the preferred choice for stability and quality), with a Marantz SA-KI Pearl Lite allowing CD and SACD playback via the receiver's digital and analogue inputs. Speakers were our revealing and boisterous KEF LS50 stand-mounters.

However, much of the listening depended on server-based music housed on a trio of DLNA-compliant devices: a Synology DS-214se NAS, a Lumin L1 NAS, and the hard drive of our Olive One network player, which was also recognised as a network music source.

The Yamaha comes with a conventional remote control handset, but it's best used in conjunction with the free MusicCast Connect app, available for iOS and Android.

The app not only shows every MusicCast-



enabled device on a network, but allows device-specific set-up and control of each recognised MusicCast-enabled component, as well as multiroom control where several MusicCast devices are present.

In the case of the R-N402, the app allowed source selection, together with volume, balance, bass and treble adjustment, speaker set selection (you can hook up two sets of speakers to the Yamaha), and repeat and shuffle modes.

Selecting the server source shows available servers on the network and allows the contents of each to be searched using artist, album, genre or folder parameters. Cover art thumbnails add visual appeal, but also make it easier to navigate larger collections.

Set-up was quick and intuitive, once I got the app to recognise the Yamaha, and included a firmware update. The review unit was brand new, so I let it run over a weekend to settle in, and it was a worthwhile exercise – the Yamaha's initially lean sound fleshed out significantly over those 60-odd hours of running in.

I started off checking whether the Yamaha would recognise and play content from my iPhone 5S using AirPlay, which it did both effortlessly and with satisfying sonic results: Richard Butler's sweeping sonic landscapes on 'Good Days Bad Days' (*Richard Butler*, via Tidal) sounded vast and panoramic, with an excellent breadth of tone, and plenty of drama.

Streaming Jeff Golub's 'Nikki's Walk' (from *Blues For You*, via Tidal) produced superb sonics – better than I expected. The sound was rich, with Golub's eloquent phrasing perfectly showcased against a backdrop of energetic brass, incisive percussion and a conversational Hammond B3.

Imelda May's gritty, rock guitar-laced 'Leave Me Lonely' (*Life. Love. Flesh. Blood*) literally jumped from the speakers with an intensity and an urge that was a revelation, given that the signal path could be considered inferior.

Yes, Tidal via AirPlay actually sounds that good, that convincing – and once Tidal support is integrated, the sonic results will be even better.



Opting for server-based material upped the sonic ante another step: Eric Clapton's laid-back but mesmerising cover of Gary Moore's 'Still Got The Blues' (*Old Sock*, 96/24 FLAC) was delivered with slick, engaging precision.

The bass was smooth but full and precise, and Clapton's articulate acoustic guitar was vividly presented. The dense arrangement was never allowed to become overwhelming, and the Yamaha never struggled to identify and contextualise every facet of the recording: from the sweeping strings and a vibrant organ to Clapton's stirring electric guitar at the end.

Seal's acoustic rendition of 'Prayer For The Dying' (*Best 1991-2004*, 48/24 FLAC) captured the warmth, the texture and timbre of Seal's vocals to compelling effect, with the delicate acoustic guitar and grand but controlled piano adding to the musical feast spread deep and wide across the generous soundstage.

Indeed, generous is a perfect description of the Yamaha R-N402: it has a generous array of inputs, and an equally generous connectivity offering, while the sonic approach is generous as far as tone, detail retrieval, soundstaging and sheer momentum is concerned.

Add the ease of use provided by the MusicCast Connect app, accurate access of material from different servers, and the ability to link to other MusicCast components, and the R-N402 represents a top-class investment in musical enjoyment.

Deon Schoeman

VITAL STATS

Power output 2x 100 watts
(40 Hz – 20 kHz, 8 ohms, 0,2% THD)
Frequency response 20 Hz – 20 kHz
(±0,5 dB)
Signal-to-noise ratio >100 dB
Audio inputs.....3x stereo RCA,
1x record loop
Digital inputs..... 1x Toslink optical,
1x coaxial RCA, USB Type A
Connectivity 10/100 Ethernet,
802.11n Wi-Fi, Bluetooth 2.1,
.....AirPlay, MusicCast
Dimensions (WxHxD)
..... 435 x 141 x 340 mm
Weight 7,3 kg

Verdict

Clean, accessible and emphatic sound from this multi-talented network receiver. MusicCast adds multiroom capability with compatible devices to extended connectivity and streaming talents.

Price R9 880

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Website www.balancedaudio.co.za

OUR RATING: 83/100

