



Yamaha RX-V381

The new RX-V381 is Yamaha's latest entry-level receiver, although that description is something of a misnomer.

It may be the junior member of Yamaha's AV receiver family, and it might not have all the features of its bigger, and dearer, stablemates. But its credentials include the likes of discrete amplification, ample power output, full 4K Ultra-HD video support, and compatibility with the most important surround sound formats.

The front panel features a clean, ergonomically accessible design that's dominated by a bright, centrally located alphanumeric display. A large rotary controller is positioned on the right, with a group of presets allowing quick selection of sources and associated settings.

Of note is the presence of a USB Type A slot, which will accept flash drives populated with audio files. Formats supported are limited to WAV, MP3, WMA and AAC, with FLAC a lamentable exclusion.

The rest of the switchgear is clearly marked and easy to use, but in all fairness, most users will opt for the full-featured remote control handset. A menu-based on-screen display is also easily navigated by the remote, adding to the Yamaha's overall user-friendliness.

The rear panel is populated with both analogue and digital inputs and outputs for audio and video. Most notable is the presence of four HDMI inputs, which remain the connection interface of choice, as they conveniently combine digital audio and video signals via a single connection.

For older, legacy components, composite video and analogue audio are offered as an alternative, but the video quality simply isn't comparable. Audio-only sources can also be linked to the Yamaha using the receiver's coaxial or optical digital interfaces. Digital connections are limited to sampling rates of 96 kHz.

The speaker binding posts are a combination of five-way designs for the front

left and right channels, and spring-loaded connectors for the centre and surround channels. The latter are easy to use, but won't accommodate thicker speaker cables. Care should also be taken to prevent stray wiring strands from shorting.

The RX-V381 is a 5.1 receiver, offering five channels – front left, centre, front right, left surround and right surround – plus a subwoofer output that typically feeds an active subwoofer.

Given that most AVRs offer 7.1 channel configurations, the 5.1 arrangement may seem inferior, but it's also true that a well set up 5.1 system will deliver excellent surround sound, and that the majority of movie soundtracks are indeed still 5.1 based. It also means that you don't have to accommodate an extra two loudspeakers.

Set-up is key to good surround sound, and the Yamaha makes that potentially treacherous aspect easy via its intuitive YPAO (short for Yamaha Parametric Acoustic Optimiser) system, which uses a





microphone to measure room acoustics, speaker properties and speaker positions, and adjusts delays and levels accordingly to create seamless channel integration and a believable surround sound field.

YPAO works really well, even though it only conducts a single set of measurements from the typical listening/viewing position, using the supplied microphone. As long as there aren't any external noises, the result is impressive.

I tend to set up AVRs by ear, using the test tone, but I found that the YPAO settings were just about spot on and needed almost no tweaking, which means anyone using the RX-V381 should be able to achieve similarly optimised results.

For those who feel a little intimidated by the connection and setup process, Yamaha provides a free app that offers easy to follow, visual instructions on how to connect and set up the receiver. It's a lot more intuitive (and fun) than the manual ...

The Yamaha arrived brand new, and once all the connections had been made and the speakers calibrated, the receiver was given a couple of days to settle in before the reviewing started in earnest.

I liked the RX-V381's sonic approach from the outset – it sounded keen and boisterous, with plenty of pace and a nicely filled out midrange which gave substance and impetus to movie dialogue,



Impacts and gun shots
were rendered with
authority, and the
on-screen action was
accurately tracked by
the sound effects...

and ensured music was delivered with presence and stature.

The receiver's bass management worked well, too, allowing slick integration of the subwoofer output, which in turn provided the necessary, solid foundation to underpin the receiver's sonic talents. As a result, effects were delivered with ample precision and punch – vital to a believable movie experience.

Trebles were clean and succinctly presented, which allowed good representation of detail, and also assisted in creating a believable sense of direction steering. It also benefited dialogue projection.

However, when it came to music, the Yamaha's treble sheen sometimes tended towards brittleness, particularly where the recordings themselves suffered from excessive glare. Of course, you could always use the tone control to roll off some of that treble.

The Yamaha is fully compatible with the latest high-resolution surround formats from Dolby Labs and DTS, and the decoding was excellent. The battle scenes between Peter Parker (aka Spider-man) and the lizard-like monster towards the end of *The Amazing Spiderman* were a good showcase for the receiver's ability to create a full, immersive movie soundtrack.

Impacts and gun shots were rendered with authority, and the on-screen action was accurately tracked by the sound effects, creating a real sense of involvement.

Similarly, the panoramic soundscapes and brutal details of the gladiator battle scenes on Ridley Scott's masterful *Gladiator* were delivered with a crisp, muscular confidence. There was real heft and substance to the sound, so that the

Software



The Amazing Spiderman (Columbia/Marvel)
Gladiator (Columbia Tristar)
Crossroads Guitar Festival 2013 (Rhino)
Roger Waters - In The Flesh (Columbia)

Associated Equipment



Oppo BDP-95EU universal player
Atlantic Technology surround sound speaker system
NAD T777 AV receiver
Optoma HD80 projector

action was as much heard as felt.

Video quality was excellent, with the Yamaha allowing the Oppo's visual talents to be utilised to the full without any interference.

Out of interest, I set up the Yamaha for 2.1 use, utilising only the left and right front loudspeakers, and the subwoofer. The results were quite startling, with the receiver still achieving excellent centre focus for the dialogue, and a spacious soundstage that created a quite believable surround impression.

As always, Yamaha has equipped the RX-V381 with a series of DSP sound fields, designed to recreate specific acoustic environments, and meant to be used as a way to enhance non-surround, two-channel material.

They're certainly impressive, but tend to sound somewhat contrived – so some experimentation is advised.

As for music, the Yamaha treats both stereo and surround sound music recordings with that same vivid, energetic approach that makes movie watching in its company a pleasure. It's an approach that works particularly well with live recordings.

Thus, the Roger Waters concert captured on *In The Flesh* was reproduced with excellent dimension and clarity, allowing the contributions of the individual band members to shine as brightly as the overall performance itself, while also capturing the ambience of the venue and the interaction of the audience.

Here, the surround sound mix was particularly impressive, really opening up the music compared to the stereo alternative, and succeeding in creating an impression of experiencing as much as listening to the music.

The same trends were prevalent when I switched to the most recent, Eric Clapton-hosted *Crossroads Guitar Festival* on Blu-ray: the DTS surround mix was wide open and believable, with strong atmospherics and excellent detail retrieval. Sonny Landreth and Derek Trucks were brilliant on 'Congo Square', with the guitars sounding visceral and almost tactilely real.

As I said at the beginning of this review,



there's nothing entry-level of the Yamaha RX-V831, despite its junior status in the range. The discrete per-channel amplification pays real dividends in terms of pace and momentum, making the receiver sound

bigger and beefier than expected, while good tonal range, excellent bass management and well-executed surround sound decoding deliver a stirring music and movie performance.

So, there's nothing entry-level about this RX-V831 – except the value-added price, that is.

Deon Schoeman

VITAL STATS

Channels	5.1
Power output	5x 70 watts (6 ohms, 0,09%THD, 20 Hz – 20 kHz)
Surround sound formats	Dolby TrueHD, DTS-HD Master Audio
Frequency response	10 Hz – 100 kHz (+0, -3 dB)
Signal-to-noise ratio	>110 dB
Connectivity	Bluetooth 2.1, USB Type A
Audio file formats	WAV, MP3, WMA, AAC
HDMI inputs/outputs	4/1
Analogue inputs	2x stereo RCA, 1x Aux (front panel)
Analogue outputs	Subwoofer out, 1x headphone jack
Digital inputs	2x coaxial RCA, 1x Toslink optical
Video inputs	3x composite
Video outputs	1x composite
Dimensions (WxDxH)	435 x 315 x 151 mm
Weight	7,4 kg

Price R7 770

Verdict

Nothing junior about the sound of this entry-level Yamaha receiver. Bold and boisterous treatment of movie soundtracks, and music too. Decent feature set includes Bluetooth.

Supplied by

Balanced Audio
011-259-7800

e-Mail

chantel@baudio.co.za

Website

www.yamaha.co.za

OUR RATING: 78 / 100

