



# Yamaha YAS-306

Yamaha adds MusicCast to a lower level of bar.

## SUMMARY

### Yamaha YAS-306 soundbar

Price: \$649

- + MusicCast multiroom
- + Two ways to orientate
- + Bluetooth & AirPlay

- Better for movies than music
- Better wallmounted than flat

Yamaha's YAS-306 soundbar offers a new low entry-point to the company's MusicCast multiroom audio system — so low that this soundbar model doesn't come with a dedicated subwoofer. Bars on their own rarely produce a satisfyingly balanced sound — so does the Yamaha have a trick up its sleeve?

## Equipment

The YAS-306 is just 95cm wide, and offers two possible orientations. In front of a TV, you lie it flat, as shown above, to keep it low and prevent it from potentially obscuring the bottom of low-standing screens — it automatically passes through IR commands to transmitters at its rear. Oddly this orientation leaves the speaker drivers

firing upwards into the air, rather than at the listener, and will also hide the status lights (now facing up) from many viewing positions... and leaves the on-device buttons at the rear. So the wallmounting option (shown right) may make more sense here — you keep the bar's largest surface and its speaker drivers facing out, the buttons are on top and you can see the status easily. The downside is that the cable connections bay then faces upwards, including a protruding fixed mains cable.

There's no HDMI here — connections are limited to networking (with Ethernet or Wi-Fi), a subwoofer output should you wish to add one, and then audio, with optical or coaxial digital inputs, and analogue on stereo RCA inputs. Mind you, when taking audio from a TV there's no guarantee of getting any real surround information — some TV optical outputs will pass surround information from broadcast but not from

connected devices, others fold everything down to stereo, a lucky few pass true surround information. Yet the YAS-306 carries logos for Dolby Audio and DTS Digital Surround, and calls itself a “front surround system” on the manual’s cover, and makes claims for the included ‘Air Surround Xtreme’ virtual sound technology inviting you to “enjoy 7.1-channel surround sound, which creates a wide and deep soundstage, as if speakers are positioned not only in front but also to the left, right and behind the listener”.

## Performance

Not really, no. There’s no real surround delivery capability here — this is not one of Yamaha’s ‘Sound Projector’ designs that use dozens of tiny drivers to throw sound around the room. At this level things are more conventional, indeed running two channels rather than the three often found on soundbars, with two 19mm tweeters, 55mm midrange and 75mm woofers, with porting through the sides of the bar (so leave some space there). Output power of  $2 \times 30W + 60W$  is quoted at the digital AV standard of THD of 10% measured at a single frequency, rather than using hi-fi levels of measurement.

You get a small remote, which prioritises various sound mode buttons over the more useful volume controls — it’s rather too easy to hit stereo, surround, bass extension, or clear voice, and with the unit flat (as opposed to wallmounted) there’s no visual feedback, even if you learn what the status lights mean. The ‘speakers firing up’ delivery in this orientation also reduced clarity compared with speakers forward, thinning and fizzing speech in particular.

Firing out, speech was kept cleanest in stereo mode, though the ‘surround’ key seemed to add a little bass and spaciousness to movie/TV fare; indeed watching *Marco*



The YAS-306 has a small conventional remote control (left), but you can also use Yamaha’s MusicCast multiroom app (right three screens) to control not only the soundbar plus a whole home of streaming multiroom MusicCast.

*Polo* on Netflix things seemed more natural with ‘surround’ engaged, while returning to the stereo button thinned and centralised things. It was good overall at bringing TV and movie sound up to a more powerful performance than your TV alone, but none of the available tonal tweaks managed to achieve much in the way of richness. We had already nudged up the bass using the ‘subwoofer’ keys, and added the bass extension, but there was little real depth to soundtracks — it managed an impression of background bass in a *Torchwood* club scene, but the arrival of massed horses in *Marco Polo* was accompanied not by a deep rumble but instead by mere midrange noise. There is that subwoofer output should you wish to add a real one — but you’d do better buying a complete package in the first place.

The extras here are, however, considerable, since this is part of Yamaha’s MusicCast family. So you can stream music to it by Bluetooth or AirPlay, or by using the MusicCast app (above) for DLNA network

streaming right up to high-res audio. With music again things were clearest in wallmount position, with speakers facing the listener rather than firing up, and in stereo not surround (the app makes things easier in terms of feedback as to what modes you have engaged). But it’s a long way from hi-fi — the upper bass was quite prominent, honky and soft — so that this is another soundbar we wouldn’t recommend for music use; we let it run but couldn’t find many positive examples of prowess; mostly we simply didn’t enjoy it.

Here, then, we find a soundbar which we would recommend primarily for movies and TV, in perhaps a smaller room than the main lounge, especially if you’re already using Yamaha’s MusicCast system elsewhere and can thereby benefit from its clever multiroom tech and control system. It was on that basis it scored a Highly Commended Award in our Sound+Image Awards under-\$1000 soundbar category. *Jez Ford* —



The wallmounting solution seems the optimal choice; in either orientation leave space at the sides for the bass ports.

## SPECS

**Yamaha YAS-306** \$649

**Drivers:** 2 x 19mm dome tweeters, 2 x 55mm midrange, 2 x 75mm woofers

**Quoted soundbar power:** 30W x 2, 60W

**Subwoofer:** 200W (no specs)

**Inputs/outputs:** 1 x optical digital, 1 x coaxial digital, 1 x analogue (RCA phono pair), Ethernet, USB (service only), Bluetooth, AirPlay, MusicCast

**MusicCast file type support:** MP3, WMA, AAC, FLAC, WAV, ALAC, AIFF

**Streaming services:** Spotify Connect, Pandora, internet radio, others via AirPlay/Bluetooth

**Dimensions (bench):** 950mm x 72mm x 131mm

**Dimensions (wallmount):** 950 x 131 x 80mm

**Weight:** 4.9kg

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