

# SOUNDCHECK

## Yamaha RBX4 A2 Bass

By Ed Friedland

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Many players believe their 12-pound Seventies-era Fender basses (the ones we used to call “boat anchors”) have superior punch and sustain. But if you think a bass has to be heavy to sound heavy, Yamaha’s RBX4 A2 bass should change your mind. It employs a new construction concept called Alternative Internal Resonance (A.I.R. for short), which results in a featherweight ax that has the balls and punch of a heavyweight.

### FEATURES

The most significant feature of the A2 is its unique body construction, which combines lightweight, resonant softwoods sandwiched between layers of harder tonewoods. The goal was to create a lightweight instrument that has depth and sustain. At a remarkable 7.3 pounds, the A2 is one of the lightest full-size basses on the market, but don’t let that fool you—it has a surprisingly hefty tone.

The unique bridge design also plays a significant role in Yamaha’s A.I.R. concept. The minimalist die-cast bridge has three “sound tubes” that extend through the body. Yamaha claims they help transfer string vibrations through the body’s inner layers. The strings are also routed through the body, a practice that some builders believe helps transmit string vibration.

The two single-coil blade pickups are positioned for aggressive tones: the bridge coil is two inches from the G string saddle (roughly Seventies J-position), and the neck coil is five inches away at essentially the same spot as the treble coil on a PBass. Undoubtedly, the A2’s most eye-catching features are the rings of red and blue LEDs that surround the individual volume controls. The lights dim as you lower the level of each pickup, and that’s about it as far as their practical use is concerned. They do look wicked cool though. It’s too bad they didn’t add a light for the tone control as well. The lighted controls might lead you to think this bass has active electronics, but in fact, the A2 is passive. The onboard battery is strictly for powering the lights.

The jet-black gloss finish is attractive, and the subtle pinstripe and metallic silver binding give the bass the look of a customized car. The rosewood fingerboard hosts 24 frets and provides reasonable clearance to the uppermost positions. Underneath the black gloss finish, the neck is maple, and its rounded “C” profile and 1 1/2-inch nut width feel comfy. Matte finished enclosed tuners match the bridge and work smoothly.

### PERFORMANCE

In the musical instrument world, it seems someone is always coming up with a brilliant new concept that sounds great on paper but rarely sounds good in wood. So it’s easy to see how the A2 bass might raise an eyebrow or two with its boast of delivering great sustain and punch without the heft associated with those qualities. But in this case, it’s true. I was happily surprised with the performance of the RBX4 A2. It’s actually a little strange to strap on a seven-pound ax and get such a beefy sound.

There is nothing missing from the A2’s tonal makeup. The notes are well formed, with a solid attack, great sustain and clarity. It does have a bright quality to it, but a simple turn of the tone knob easily rounds off the edge. The A2 can get a killer modern slap tone, a well-articulated burp for soloing, a chunky front pickup tone that will fill up the low end, and also has real cutting power for agitated rock.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

In spite of its list price, this instrument has been selling for as low as \$549. That said, there’s nothing cheap about this ax, and don’t make the mistake of equating the A2’s lightweight with inferior craftsmanship. If you play long hours on your feet, or just want a cool-looking bass that has great tone (and lights!), the A2 is well worth considering.



#### Yamaha RBX4 A2 Bass

**LIST PRICE: \$999.00**

**MANUFACTURER: Yamaha,**  
[yamaha.com](http://yamaha.com)

**Pro** Lightweight; big tone; cool lighted  
volume controls

**Con** Gloss finish on neck can feel sticky;  
no lights on tone control