

BARGAIN HUNTING: GUITARS UNDER \$600

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NEW GEAR

Yamaha LS16 ARE
Takamine GD20-NS
BeatBuddy
Veillette Gryphon





A Hybrid Lives Up to Its Name

The 12-string Gryphon grants guitarists easy access to mandolin-like effects

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

AT A GLANCE

VEILLETTE GRYPHON

TOP

Sitka spruce

BODY

Solid-wood mahogany

PRICE

\$1,500 street

veilletteguitars.com



Any guitarist who's ever attempted to double on the mandolin knows that this isn't an easy proposition. The mandolin might look like a tiny archtop guitar, but, tuned in perfect fifths, it's more closely related to the violin. And transferring from an instrument tuned in fourths (and a major third)—the standard guitar tuning—to one in fifths is like learning a new language.

With more than four decades of experience as a guitar builder, the Woodstock-based master luthier Joe Veillette (pronounced vay-ett) created the Gryphon, an instrument that grants guitarists easy access to mandolin-like effects. Named after the mythical beast that's part lion and part eagle, the asymmetrical Gryphon is a small 12-string that's tuned like a standard guitar, but a minor seventh higher, from D to D, with six unison string courses.

Until recently, a new Gryphon cost more than \$4,000, but now Veillette offers a Korean-made version at less than half that price. From the all-solid-wood mahogany-and-Sitka-spruce construction to the single-bolt neck system, the Avante model, by Veillette Gryphon, boasts the same features as its U.S. counterpart.

The Avante Gryphon, like all instruments by Veillette, is a study in restraint. There are no

position markers on the rosewood fretboard, only side dots, and the twin soundholes have no binding or rosette work. And it's nicely built, with perfect fretwork and a smooth glossy finish that's free from imperfections.

It's a pleasure to play the Gryphon. The 18.5-inch-scale neck gives the fretting fingers more room to move around than a mandolin neck, typically with a scale of just under 14 inches. The action is low and agreeable, and it's as easy to fret barre chords on the instrument as it is to play brisk single-note runs.

The sound of the Gryphon is a revelation. As promised, it does have the midrange punch, crystalline highs, and shimmering quality of a good mandolin. In many recording and performing situations, it would be an appropriate substitute for a mandolin. But, given the guitar-based tuning, the Gryphon is more harmonically flexible, and it can transform even the most basic guitar-chord grips into something empyrean—a sound that amplifies well thanks to the built-in under-saddle piezo and custom-voiced preamp.

At around \$1,500 street, the Avante Gryphon is not necessarily a bargain for an imported instrument. But it would be a definite boon for the guitarist looking to expand his or her tonal palette without learning a new instrument. **AC**

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