

**SPECIAL FEATURE** MEET THE COMPANY LOOKING TO REVOLUTIONISE ACOUSTIC GUITAR MANUFACTURING

# ACOUSTIC

The UK's only dedicated acoustic monthly. Only £4.95

## JAMIE LAWSON

THE FIRST SIGNING TO  
ED SHEERAN'S RECORD  
LABEL SPEAKS OUT

## JASON ISBELL

ON THE RUNAWAY SUCCESS OF  
*SOMETHING MORE THAN FREE*

## MALCOLM HOLCOMBE

BRINGS THE VOICE OF  
PROTEST BACK TO MUSIC  
IN THE USA

# BRAD PAISLEY & SANTA CRUZ

## EXCLUSIVE

FIRST UK REVIEW OF THE COUNTRY SUPERSTAR'S SIGNATURE GUITAR,  
PLUS AN IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW WITH SANTA CRUZ FOUNDER AND  
LUTHIER EXTRAORDINAIRE RICHARD HOOVER

ISSUE 113 JANUARY 2016 UK £4.95



[www.acousticmagazine.com](http://www.acousticmagazine.com)

**25 PAGES OF GEAR REVIEWS:** KRAUT + TANGLEWOOD + MANUEL RODRIGUEZ + SIMON & PATRICK + VEILLETTE



# VEILLETTE

## AVANTE GRYPHON

*Sam Wise gets to grips with an unusual 12-string guitar from Joe Veillette that sits somewhere between a mandolin and bouzouki and is, dare we say it, rather cute...*

WORDS: SAM WISE IMAGES: RICHARD ECCLESTONE

Joe Veillette started out as half of Veillette-Citron, an unlikely union of two architects building high end electric guitars in 1976. After pioneering baritone guitars, neck-through body construction and high-strung guitars, their partnership ended in 1983, and after various ventures mostly in bass guitar building, Joe formed Veillette Guitars in 1994. For a long time, he stuck with custom building, which is still a key part of the business, but more recently, he's gone the foreign manufacturing route, overseeing the building of baritone and high-strung guitars in Asia under the Avante name. Avante offers no standard guitars at all; finding itself a niche market with six- and 12-string baritones, and this, the Gryphon, a short scale 12 string tuned D to D, as though a standard guitar were capoed at the 10th fret.

To a guitar reviewer who gets to see a lot of identikit, mid market, Martin-alike guitars, the Gryphon is a breath of fresh air. We defy you to pull it out of its custom case without thinking 'This is cute!' because it really is. Dinky in size, unusual in shape and styling, and short of neck, the Gryphon doesn't look like anything you've got hung on your wall. For a £1,000 guitar, it's notably short on adornment; the heavily offset solid sitka top is bound in plain black, and there is no decoration around the twin offset soundholes. The back and sides are sapele, not especially figured, and the heel-less, bolt on neck is mahogany. The rosewood fingerboard has 21 frets, at least on the treble side (the diagonal fingerboard end only allows the top fret to cover the four highest strings), but no dot position markers, while the trademark swooping headstock, with its 12 black chrome closed back tuners, only has a rosewood faceplate and a silk screened logo. None of this is to say that the little Veillette looks or feels cheap, however.



***“Dinky in size, unusual in shape and styling, we defy you to pull it out of its custom case without thinking ‘This is cute!’”***

Everything about it, from the chunky, super short scale neck to the zero fret and those unbranded tuners, feels quality. It simply seems like a matter of priorities. For all that this is a fascinating piece of kit, it's always going to be niche, and if the numbers are small, and the quality is high, something has to give. The truth is that Veillette's custom instruments are similarly unadorned – it's simply not his style. It's evident, however, that even though nothing is branded, the Gryphon is built to a standard that reflects its price. Even the unnamed pickup and preamp match the quality of the rest of the instrument.

Simply put, the Gryphon doesn't sound quite like anything else. The unison tuned courses and the range in which it is tuned lend it a mandolin-like air, but you can't play the sort of chords on a mandolin that you can on this. It has the air of a bouzouki, perhaps, with those low notes, but again a full complement of six courses lets you go places that these similar instruments can never go. With such a high tuning and 12 strings, you might expect a bit of a fight out of the Gryphon, but it's beautifully set up and barely requires more effort than a regular six string. It can be a little cramped when playing certain chords at the nut, but once you get up the neck there is no issue. The top end chimes wonderfully, a combination of there being nearly an octave above what you're used to, and the doubling of the strings (it's almost tempting to detune one ever so slightly for a tremolo effect). As you come down through the midrange, the tone beefs up, though of course never enough to sound like a regular six or even 12 string. It's taut sounding and punchy, and you can't help wondering how it would sound with octave-tuned low strings, though physics would make this a difficult task to achieve. It's interestingly difficult to



***“Treat it as an instrument unto itself; sit and play, and see what music comes through your fingers. Even better, sit with a regular guitarist, and find some new ways into old songs”***

**VEILLETTE AVANTE GRYPHON**

**NEED TO KNOW**

**Manufacturer:** Veillette

**RRP:** £1,195

**Body Length:** 15 1/8”

**Overall Length:** 32 1/8”

**Upper Bout:** 8 3/4”

**Lower Bout:** 12 5/8”

**Body Depth at Neck Heel:** 2 7/8”

**Body Depth at Tail Block:** 3 9/16”

**Made in:** USA

**Top:** Sitka spruce

**Back and Sides:** Sapele mahogany

**Neck:** Mahogany

**Fingerboard:** Rosewood

**Frets:** 13 (to body)

**Tuners:** Black chrome

**Nut Width:** 1 15/16”

**Scale Length:** 18 1/8”

**Gig bag/ Case Included:** Original soft gigbag

**ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS**

**Pros:** Jangly and adorable

**Cons:** Rather niche and pricey

**Overall:** We're in love

**ACOUSTIC RATING**

**Sound Quality:** ★★★★★

**Build Quality:** ★★★★★

**Value for Money:** ★★★★★

**5 Stars:** Superb, almost faultless

**4 Stars:** Excellent, hard to beat

**3 Stars:** Good, covers all bases well

**2 or 1 Stars:** Below average, poor

**CONTACT DETAILS**

[www.acousticcentre.co.uk](http://www.acousticcentre.co.uk)





***“We couldn’t put the Gryphon down, and when we did, we were soon picking it up again. It’s a fascinating instrument, easy to play, yet challenging and intriguing”***

know what to play on an instrument that’s equal parts familiar and alien; it’s almost impossible to put it down, but running through your favourite songs is a mixed bag. Most songs, played as you would on a regular guitar, won’t feel right, but in our experience, you’ll come across the odd one that sounds utterly transformed.

More fun is to be had by treating it as an instrument unto itself; sit and play, and see what music comes through your

fingers. Even better, sit with a regular guitarist, and find some new ways into old songs; the combinations of shapes, voicings and timbres is fascinating. Plugged in, the Gryphon is much as it is unplugged. One of the benefits of such a high-tuned instrument is that voicing the pickup must be relatively simple.

The best summary here is that we couldn’t put the Gryphon down, and when we did, we were soon picking it up again. It’s a

fascinating little instrument, easy to play, yet challenging and intriguing, and it was only here for a matter of hours before we were plotting what we could sell to buy one.

It would be easy to say it’s not for everyone, but you know, it just might be, as long as you don’t expect it to do a ‘normal guitar’ job. If you’ve already got a good six-string that you love, try one of these before you supplement it with anything else – it’s very likely to win your heart. ■