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REVIEW



VEILLETTE GRYPHON AVANTE 12

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

THE YEARNING TO CREATE MORE chiming textures has traditionally led many guitarists straight to the mandolin. But the obvious hurdle to making the transition from guitar to mando is that fact that the latter is tuned in fifths (like a violin) instead of (mostly) fourths, like a guitar. It's a whole new thing, and when you throw in the mandolin's four courses (8 strings), narrow neck, and tight fret spacing, the transition gets even tougher.

Some years back, Joe Veillette introduced an acoustic-electric instrument called the Gryphon that was designed to deliver some of that mando-style magic, but in a form that would be way easier for guitar players to grok. A compact

12-string with a wide neck and an 18.5" scale fretboard, the Gryphon was tuned like a guitar, but with the outside pairs pitched *D* to *D*. It totally did the high-tuned sonic trick, while feeling very familiar to the fingers, and the only downside was its \$4,000-plus price tag—a show stopper for a lot of players. Fast forward to 2015, and the Gryphon Avante hits the scene to change all that.

Built in Korea to Veillette's exacting standards, the Avante features solid mahogany back and sides and a solid spruce top. The 18.5"-scale mahogany bolt-on neck plays well thanks to its generous width and expert setup. And with a zero fret assisting the intonation, the Avante sounds tuneful throughout its

short fretboard, making for sweet sounding chords anywhere you finger them.

Cosmetically the Avante is fairly austere, but its gloss-finished body is trimmed in black binding and there are inlaid black stripes at the front of the cutaway and the tail. The neck wears a smooth satin finish and the peghead has a gloss black overlay. The smoked chrome tuners with black buttons are a nice touch, and the only position markers are on the side of the rosewood fretboard.

The electronics consist of an under-saddle piezo pickup that feeds a preamp with Volume and Tone controls, which are mounted just inside the upper soundhole. Power is supplied by a 9-volt battery that resides in a quick-release holder located



below the endpin jack.

Despite its compact dimensions (32.5" long x 12" wide x 3" deep), the Gryphon Avante 12 delivers a robust acoustic sound and has no problem being heard alongside full-sized flat-tops and other stringed instruments. It's inviting to play, and its high chiming tone is instantly inspiring, making it ideal for Americana, folk, and other styles where alternative instruments are de rigueur. The Avante's electronics enhance its flexibility when performing live, and help to make this unique instrument a real boon for guitarists who occasionally need to take the instrumental high road in their band, as well as anyone else who seeks an easy way to twang in the mando zone. 🎸

Gryphon Avante 12

CONTACT	veilletteguitars.com
PRICE	\$1,495 street
NUT WIDTH	1.94"
NECK	Mahogany, bolt-on
FRETBOARD	Rosewood, 18.5" scale
FRETS	21, not including zero fret
TUNERS	Die-cast
BODY	Solid mahogany back and sides, solid spruce top
BRIDGE	Rosewood w/compensated saddle
Electronics	Piezo pickup and active preamp
CONTROLS	Volume and Tone
FACTORY STRINGS	D'Addario Phosphor Bronze, .008-.042
WEIGHT	3.72 lbs
BUILT	Korea
KUDOS	Excellent quality. Plays well. Makes it easy for guitarists to play mandolin-sounding parts.
CONCERNS	Prickly fret ends could use a bit of filing.