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VG Approved Gear

Cardinal's Magpie

Bird in Hand

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a clever design.

The Magpie's electronics were pretty straightforward: a pair of Lollar El Rayo humbucking pickups with tortoise covers and chrome bezels, along with CTS Volume and Tone knobs and a Switchcraft three-way pickup selector. The Magpie, which came with a Hiscox hardshell case featuring retro luggage latches, weighed in at approximately 7.6 pounds.

Plugged in, the Cardinal Magpie sounded as cool as its looked. Perhaps not too surprisingly, the nontraditional tonewoods typically produced non-trad guitar sounds more in the Fender camp than Gibson despite the humbuckers. The bridge pickup had a definite twang to it, while the bridge was warmer and fat, but with a puckery edge. However, the middle combination offered a nasally, out-of-phase type of tone excellent for the blues, and dialing in various flavors with volume and tone resulted in a wide range of interesting tones that were not quite Strat single-coil, but closer to an edgier P-90 vibe. All manner of blues, country, and retro guitarists could be sure to find many wonderful pleasures. More importantly, in all positions, the walnut body held notes for many seconds longer than a lot of other guitars.

The Magpie's neck was exceptionally well-finished and easy to play. Note that the Magpie has a big neck, even near the lower frets, which seems to be a microtrend among some luthiers today. It doesn't affect comfort, but prepare to grab some serious wood when playing the Magpie. Consider, too, that this is a custom guitar and, when ordering, the buyer can surely discuss with Evans particular tastes in neck shape.

Overall, the Cardinal Magpie is a hip, handmade guitar featuring beautiful craftsmanship and killer looks that are not afraid to plow off the beaten path. If looking for a singular instrument with a gorgeous finish and killer sustain, this is one to consider.

Cardinal Magpie

Price: \$4,300

Contact: www.cardinalinstruments.com

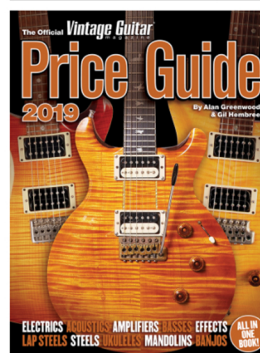
While most folks are happy to buy guitars off the rack, the Cardinal Magpie is a prime example of today's handcrafted, built-to-order guitars that exist apart from the masses. Coming from the shop of Austin, Texas, luthier Sam Evans, the Magpie exudes old-world craftsmanship and crisp attention to detail.

The chambered, single-cutaway Magpie as tested featured bookmatched, deeply figured old-orchard-growth Claro walnut on the top and back, and a core of black walnut. The edges of both the top and back were elegantly rounded off for a seamless transition between wood sections. Purpleheart accent stripes between the claro and black walnut added visual detail.

Cardinal's Magpie features a bolt-on black walnut neck with a large flat-C carve and a Texas ebony fretboard with a 12" radius and 25 1/2" scale length and fitted with a vintage bone nut. The guitar is finished with a nontoxic, hand-rubbed varnish made from a thin, late-19th-century recipe. The result is very satiny, almost-bare stain – you hardly know it's there. Running a hand around the body reveals a seductively smooth finish.

Design-wise, the Cardinal Magpie tested featured a singular headstock with downward-facing tuners and unique mother-of-pearl inlays and side dots. The thin, lyre-like headstock was faced with a claro walnut veneer to match the body. A TonePros wraparound six-saddle bridge and Sperzel Sound-Lok tuners were both nickel, while a rear control-cavity cover cut from the back itself was

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