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La Patrie Hybrid CW

by Patrick Francis

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La Patrie Hybrid CW

A flashy-looking nylon-string with killer electronics and exceptional playability for those accustomed to electric guitars and modern steel-string acoustics.

by Patrick Francis

More than 20 years ago, Robert Godin began building guitars in Québec, Canada, in the small village of La Patrie. Over the years, Godin's guitar business has expanded into a large-scale operation with five manufacturing sites in Canada, and one in the US. Famed for the excellent craftsmanship, playability, and affordability of their instruments, not to mention an innovative design philosophy (their synth-compatible Multiac acoustic-electrics were truly groundbreaking), the company now offers six guitar lines that run the gamut from electric to acoustic, acoustic-electric, and classical. Their most notable new guitar is the La Patrie Hybrid CW nylon-string—an acoustic-electric instrument that's designed to yield excellent tones with playability that's more comfortable for guitarists used to the slimmed-down neck dimensions on electric guitars and modern acoustic designs.

FLASHY LOOKS, FLAWLESS JOINERY

Positioned toward the upper end of the five-model La Patrie line of nylon-strings, the Hybrid isn't loaded with ornate appointments, but our review model's "Light Burst" finish (as well as the glossy-black alternative) is downright flashy compared to your average nylon-string. The adjustable truss rod is another uncommon feature for a nylon-string. Although the Hybrid's neck width and string spacing follow classical standards, the truss rod allows a sleeker neck profile

without sacrificing neck stability. It also lets you adjust neck relief easily, which is great for dialing in a perfect setup.

Uniform and utterly flawless, the Hybrid's finish is one of its outstanding features. Godin takes a traditional approach, using several coats of lacquer in an eight-day process that achieves an optimal balance between protection and tone. Externally, the guitar's joinery was perfect, as well. Inside, though, there were a few glue globs, and the hole for the pickup's cable was drilled through one of the seven fan braces—surprising considering the guitar's otherwise high-quality craftsmanship and the makers' obvious attention to detail. While the ivory-colored plastic binding isn't fancy, it's far less likely than wooden binding to suffer a ding when you bonk it on a microphone stand.

PAINLESS PLAYABILITY, IMMEDIATE TONES

Playability, of course, is what the Hybrid is all about, and its extremely slim neck



At a Glance

La Patrie Hybrid CW

HIGHLIGHTS	Slim-profile neck, fretboard radius, and nice setup make for great playability. Admirable craftsmanship.
THE SPECS	Solid Canadian cedar top. Laminated-mahogany back and sides. Indian rosewood fretboard and bridge. Fan bracing. Bolt-on Honduran mahogany neck with satin finish and double-action truss rod. Graph Tech Tusq nut and saddle. Godin Quantum II electronics. Glossy nitrocellulose-lacquer body finish. Gold-plated tuners. 25¾-inch scale. 24-inch fretboard radius. 2-inch nut. 2¼-inch spacing at bridge. Made in Canada.
WATCH FOR	Preamp controls are hard to read.
THIS IS COOL	Incredibly flexible amplified sounds. Superior finish.
BEST FOR	Players looking for a solid-top, acoustic-electric nylon-string they can gig with—for under a grand.
PRICE	\$739 list/ \$519 street (with TRIC hard-shell case).
MAKER	Godin Guitars: (514) 457-7977; www.godinguitars.com.

contour does indeed make for easy fretting, while the radiused fretboard makes playing barre chords a cinch compared to flat, traditional nylon-string fretboards. All of this—not to mention the position markers on the side of the fretboard, which aren't standard on traditional nylon-strings—adds up to a neck that will require very little acclimating for steel-string players.

Played acoustically, the La Patrie had a soft, responsive feel when plucking or strumming, and the crisp attack you expect from a nice cedar-topped instrument—although the tones also sound somewhat delicate, with the most resonant responses coming from the fourth and fifth strings. In general, the guitar sounds warm and pleasant, but its low-midrange emphasis sometimes feels subdued. Playing single lines up and down the fretboard revealed just enough “pop” in the treble strings, but the high E lacked the clarity of the G and B strings. Overall, whether playing Leo Brouwer's arpeggio study *Estudio Sencillo No. 6* or plucking Led Zeppelin's “Babe, I'm Gonna Leave You,” I found myself wishing for a bit more sparkle.

The Hybrid came set up with rather low action, and when I tried squeezing out more volume by really digging into some scales, it responded with fret buzz reminiscent of what you'd get trying the same thing on a flamenco guitar. With that in mind, I launched into a quasi-flamenco improvisation full of *rasgueados* (rapid strumming with the back of the fingers) and percussive scales played with the thumb. To my delight, this produced a gratifying midrange bark and a very punchy sound.

POWERFUL MIXING CAPABILITIES

The Hybrid's proprietary Quantum II electronics use a piezo undersaddle pickup and an internal electret microphone (mounted on an adjustable gooseneck arm), and reportedly operates for 200 hours on a single nine-volt battery. I appreciated its simple control scheme—Treble, Bass, and Volume knobs, and a double-duty Mic knob that blends the internal mic and undersaddle pickup signals and switches phasing between the two. (At 12 o'clock, the mic is off. Turn it counterclockwise or clockwise to activate the microphone output in or out of phase with the saddle pickup, respectively. The further you turn the knob, the more mic signal in the mix.) After working

with the Mic control for a while, I really appreciated how Godin packed so much functionality into a single knob—very clever.

Plugging into my Fender Princeton Reverb and experimenting with the mic controls, I was intrigued by the big differences at extreme settings. With the saddle pickup soloed, the sound was one-dimensional, and I had to cut the treble quite a bit to eradicate picking-hand noise—but then it sounded too muffled. Happily, adding mic signal produced much better tone, particularly in the out-of-phase position. However, feedback also became more of an issue, leading me to conclude that an outboard notch filter or careful positioning away from an amplifier would be necessary for live playing. Next, I plugged the Hybrid into my Mackie 1202-VLZ Pro and listened through my Sony MDR-V900 headphones. After experimenting, I found the sound of the mic turned all the way up and out of phase with the saddle, and with bass attenuated a bit, to be the most pleasing and natural. It had detail

With its flexible controls and simple interface, the Hybrid's preamp pretty much has all the bases covered.

and depth—and the finger noise was greatly reduced. Godin deserves kudos for offering more sound-shaping power than many other nylon-string acoustic-electrics do: With its flexible controls, simple interface, and excellent phase control, the Quantum II pretty much has all the bases covered.

THE WRAP

Blending thoughtful design, cool electronics, and traditional craftsmanship, Godin is definitely onto something with its La Patrie Hybrid CW. This is an extremely well-crafted guitar with easy playability and an excellent pickup system. Steel-string and electric players in particular will likely find it to be an easy adjustment. Top it all off with a solid cedar top and impressive attention to detail, and you have a nylon-string crossover ax worth checking out.

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