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Serenading The Grapes

ACCLAIMED GREEK GUITARIST PAVLO DISHES ABOUT HIS MERITAGE—A CELEBRITY WINE WITH REAL *ARXIDIA*

“When I started playing guitar at age 10, I never thought I’d have my own wine,” declares Pavlo, Greek-Canadian concert guitarist and now proud bearer of his own limited edition wine.

Pavlo’s unique blend of Mediterranean, Flamenco, and Latin music has garnered him international attention. His recent foray into wine, while not quite on the same scale as his music, has also enjoyed great success; bars and restaurants throughout southern Ontario quickly bought up all 100 cases of his Meritage. Like his music, Pavlo’s wine is a blend: Meritage combines the classic grape varieties used in French Bordeaux.

This concoction is manufactured by Mastronardi, a family-operated winery in the Lake Erie North Shore region of Ontario. “The people at Mastronardi rock,” Pavlo says. “As passionate as I am about music, they are about wine—they are out there every day.”

It’s refreshing to see a celebrity taking a real interest in the wine that bears his name, rather than treat-

ing it as yet another way to pad the bank account. (“Just put that case of wine next to the stack of golf shirts, Pepsi cans, and shampoo—I have to film a Ford commercial in an hour!”) It also bodes well when the wine is produced by a small boutique winery rather than any of the 200,000 cases-per-year production lines.

While Pavlo responds with charming enthusiasm to my query about the possibility of owning his own winery (“Are you kidding? I romanticize about that!”), he’s also well aware that making good wine takes a lot of hard work, dedication, and skill—and therefore he doesn’t know how hands-on he could ever be, since his first passion is music. “Maybe I could stroll through the vineyards and serenade the grapes,” he laughs.

But Pavlo did have a hand in the creation of his wine—a rather atypical trait of celebrity wines, which rarely receive much more input from the celebrity than permission to use their name. “I certainly can’t take all the credit,” Pavlo says. “The winemaker, Lyse LeBlanc, is the real force.”

Still, Pavlo makes it clear that he was part of the process all the way through: “Meritage is all about the blend,” he says, “and I tasted through

all the wines and experimented with blends until we arrived at something we were both happy with.”

In fact, Pavlo is so proud of his wine that he declares his Meritage to be “better than any other celebrity wine.” I give him credit for *arxidia* (balls!), even though his competition is not, shall we say, intense. We snickered at the “hockey player” and “comedian” wines that are the jokes of southern Ontario—I’m not naming names, but you know who they are. Pavlo unabashedly declares these wines to be awful, and having tasted them myself, I have to concur.

His emphatic confidence in his wine’s superiority has certainly whetted my appetite. Unfortunately, the wine sold out immediately after release. However, Pavlo assures me that next year he will be doing a much larger run, and he will also add a white to his portfolio—probably an unoaked Chardonnay. “I love that style, and it’s so versatile,” he says. He’s also pushing to get the wine into liquor stores across Canada, especially our fair province: “Alberta is my biggest fanbase, so the wine will definitely be sold there,” he says, looking forward to his upcoming show at the Arden theatre on April 11.

Pavlo notes that Canada’s wines



Drink It Up | Pavlo loves wine, and his guitar. And sometimes confuses the two. PHOTO SUPPLIED

are underestimated, especially by Canadians themselves. For all the snobbery and vast amounts of money that ferment in the wine industry, it just

comes down to matters of taste. As Pavlo proudly notes, “I’m not a wine expert, but I am a wine lover.”