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Pavlo makes his debut at Massey Hall this evening: 'I've seen all my favourite artists there... To actually be on that same stage? I might cry.'

This Pavlo has listeners drooling

He built a fan base by playing craft fairs and small venues. Then he took on recording giant BMG. Now he has the resources he needs to get much wider exposure

BY LI ROBBINS

After perusing aisles of wind chimes, wooden-moose coat racks and quilted tea cozies, Pavlo's music must have seemed impossibly, enticingly exotic. And "exotic" — a word the guitarist uses to describe his own music — is apparently what craft-fair shoppers wanted. Pavlo had struggled for years to make his living as a musician, until he began playing for free at craft fairs in the 1990s. He found his fans at the fairs, and on a very good week as many as a thousand of them would buy his CD.

"The demographics were right on the money," says Pavlo from his Toronto home. "It was primarily 30- to 50-year-olds, 80 per cent women."

Why women? Pavlo sidesteps the question, laughing. If you need an answer, though, even a glimpse of a Pavlo video provides it — the phrase "smouldering gaze" seems invented for the guy.

Getting from the painted duck decoys to Massey Hall wasn't just a result of pizzazz as an entertainer, though. Chalk that up to a dogged persistence.

"It really is a dream come true," the Toronto-born Pavlo says of his Massey Hall debut tonight. "I've seen all my favourite artists there, from Sting to Paco de Lucía. To actually be on that same stage? I

might cry."

That's okay. Displays of passion are not amiss at a Pavlo concert. His idiosyncratic blend of Latin music, flamenco, and the music of his own Greek heritage is unabashedly romantic. It's also undeniably successful. Last summer almost 25,000 people went nuts for it at the Montreal International Jazz Festival. But Pavlo got there the hard way.

"This isn't your *Canadian Idol* situation," he says. "This is the real old-fashioned way. I've toured across Canada at least 10 times. You go by the town the first time and you have 10 people. The second time, you have 15, the third time 100, and so on."

En route he got himself some serious management — Bernie Fiedler, who also manages Liona Boyd — and a tour with Boyd continued to broaden his audience. Now Pavlo plays up to 200 concerts a year, not turning his nose up at the odd corporate gig. (Canadian chiropactors can catch him at their approaching convention in Vancouver.) He's breaking into the European market as well. A recent tour of Germany led to a return invite, and to German-based *Phantoms* star Anna Maria Kaufmann joining him on his Canadian tour this fall.

But Pavlo's European expansion hinged on another facet of his business savvy — how to capitalize on

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the mistakes of others. In 2000, R&B star R. Kelly had a big hit with a salacious and fortuitously repetitious number called *Fiesta*. One of the hooks was a four-note guitar lick. Pavlo, hearing *Fiesta* on his car radio, instantly recognized the lick as a sample from one of his own recordings, a song called *Fantasia*. He didn't immediately rush in where other ripped-off musicians fear to tread though.

"We're talking about BMG, we're talking about a billion-dollar company, what's little Pavlo in Toronto doing to do? I can't just phone these people up and say, 'hey, you took my song.'"

So he set about to gather evidence, using a device called an

audio graph to create graphs of each riff, and preparing audio samples. With this ammunition R. Kelly's representatives took him seriously, and after 2½ years Pavlo received 25-per-cent rights to the song.

"It changed everything. For the first time in my life I had the funds to do what I really wanted to do."

What he really wanted to do was take his music to the world. So, plowing the R. Kelly windfall into expensive overseas touring, Pavlo re-enacted his musical siege of Canada in England, town by town. Since then he's been back three times, and is heading over again in February — booked into 800-seat theatres, instead of locals.

And his higher profile back home, evidenced by the Massey Hall gig, provides some bonus satisfaction for the man who tried to no avail to interest record labels, back in his craft-show days.

"They did everything but laugh at me. They wouldn't even give it a chance. They'd be like, if you're going to do flamenco or Latin just do straight flamenco or Latin, why would you put Greek music in?" He chuckles. "Obviously they were wrong."

Pavlo performs at Toronto's Massey Hall tonight at 8 (416-872-4255).

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