



TARA WALTON/TORONTO STAR

Pavlo, a grassroots guitarist who hit gold when his song was looped in an R. Kelly hit, first played at One of a Kind craft show.

## Local hero has 'dream' Massey gig

JOHN GODDARD  
STAFF REPORTER

The posters have been up for weeks in storefronts along the Danforth.

After eight years of building a fan base at craft shows, street festivals and, of late, small theatres, local hero Pavlo is to play Massey Hall tonight.

"Just stepping onto the stage I might cry," he said recently over dinner at Mezes, one of his Danforth Ave. hang-outs. "It's that sentimental to me. I grew up going to Massey Hall to see Paco Pena, Liona Boyd, Paco de Lucia — I must have seen 150 acts there."

Now 37, he grew up in the neighbourhood as Pavlo Simtikidis, the son of immigrants from northern Greece. He studied classical guitar but early on began combining Spanish flamenco, Greek bouzouki and various Mideast styles into his signature rapid-fire festive pop that he calls "Mediterranean."

He also studied the music business at Toronto's Harris Institute for the Arts — production, engineering, management, everything he needed to know to become an independent artist — and in 1998 set out to find his audience, beginning at the One of a Kind craft show.

He played for free and from his guitar case sold his self-produced CD of guitar songs, *Pavlo*. Then he started travelling with three accompanists to craft fairs across North America.

"In one week, I would sell 1,000 CDs," he said over calamari and octopus. "All the profit would go directly to me."

More self-produced CDs of his compositions followed — *Fantasia*, *I Feel Love Again*, *Frostbite* — and by 2004 he had sold 400,000 units without a major record label or commercial radio play.

"I'm a really under-the-radar type of artist and I kind of like that," he said. "Musically I'm in control. I'm never dictated to by anyone."

A lucky break brought even more independence.

While riding in his car one day, Pavlo heard a four-note lick from his song "Fantasia" looped 27 times into a radio tune. It turned out to be the hit single "Fiesta" by Chicago R&B star R. Kelly, which sold 5.5 million copies and was featured on Kelly's 4-million-selling album *TP-2.com*.

A friend of R. Kelly's had bought Pavlo's CD at one his Florida appearances and passed it on.

Pavlo notified R. Kelly's people of the sample and received a 25 per cent song credit, which to date has earned the Toronto artist more than \$1 million.

"With the R. Kelly (royalties) I'm able to go around the world without worrying about a breakeven point," Pavlo said. "I've just played 17 cities in Germany, which normally I would not have been able to do."

"In February, I'm going to England for the fourth time and this is the first time I'll be making money."

Confident of local fan support, Pavlo has also underwritten the Massey Hall concert and arranged to record it for his seventh CD, *Live at Massey Hall*.

Joining him onstage will be his three-member tour band, vocalist John Acosta, six other musicians, a salsa dancing couple and a belly dancer.

After dinner, he talked of a 6 a.m. start the next day to drive to Gaspé, Que., where they were to play for two hours and drive back again. "If it's a place I've never played before, I'll play it. I don't care where it is. My goal is to play every place (in Canada) at least once."

### Just the facts

**Who:** Pavlo

**When:** Tonight, 8 p.m.

**Where:** Massey Hall, 60 Simcoe St.

**Tickets:** \$29.50 to \$49.50 at Roy Thomson Hall box office,

[masseyhall.com](http://masseyhall.com) or 416-872-4255