

Like fine wine, Pavlo gets better

Guitarist finding fame through his Greek roots and now lends name to limited edition vintage

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ENTERTAINMENT COLUMNIST

Not many guitar players can boast about having a wine named after them.

But the Signature Limited Reserve Pavlo Meritage, advertised on the website of the Mastronardi Estate Winery of Kingsville, Ont., on the southern edge of the Niagara Peninsula, as "a passionate duet of fine wine and the melodic harmonies of Pavlo's Mediterranean music... an exquisite Meritage with aromatic anise, velvety dark chocolate and hints of black currant", is a singular tribute that the Toronto-based Greek concert guitarist considers one of the unexpected benefits of his unusual path to fame and fortune.

The vintage, to be launched Saturday at a VIP gathering following Pavlo's performance that night at Massey Hall — it's his second show at the prestigious concert hall in two years — came about, like most things in Pavlo's life, through music.

"I played at one of the Mastronardi family vineyard concerts last year, and I guess they were impressed by what I did," the Danforth's best known musical son and the formerly anonymous fixture at countless local weddings and back-

yard parties, said during an interview earlier this week at Mezes, one of his favourite hangouts in Toronto's bustling Greek village. He's playing at the winery again next summer, he added.

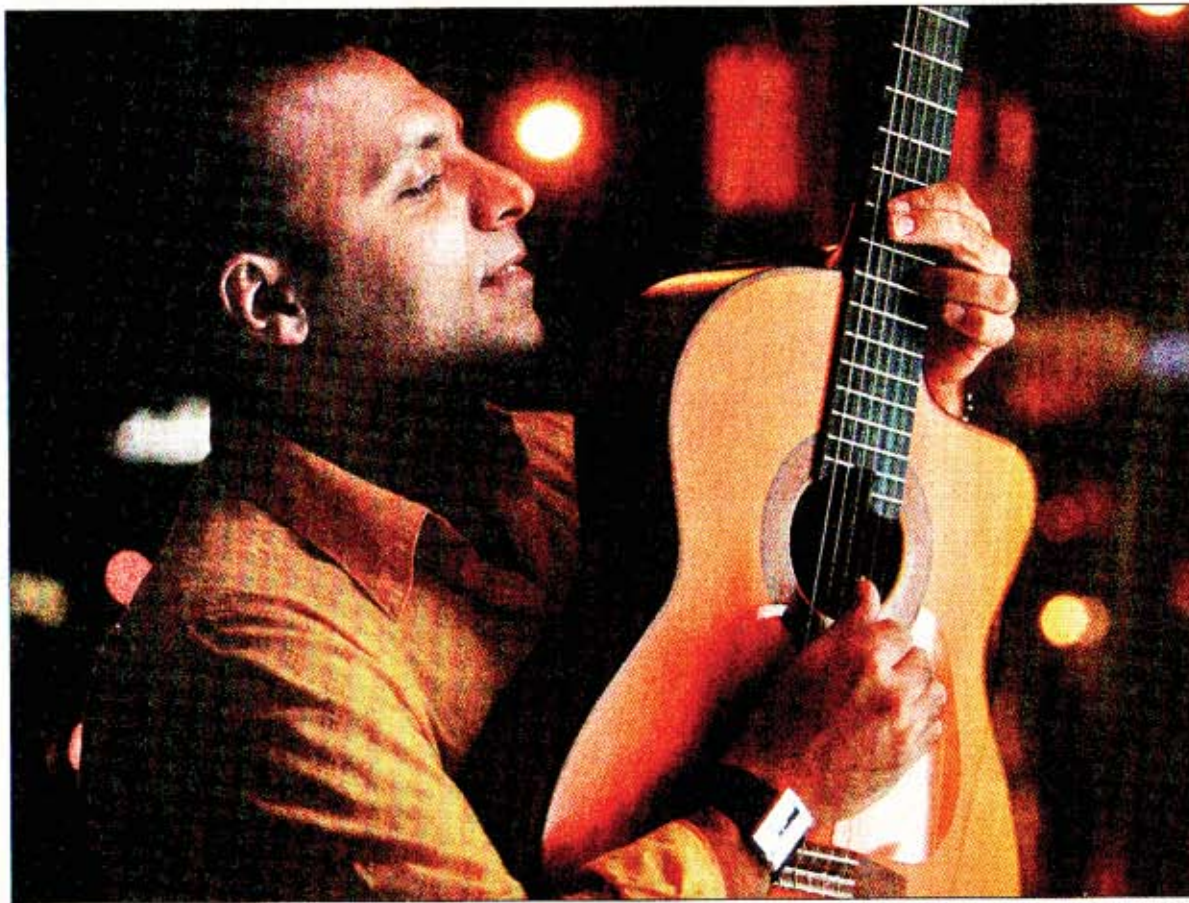
"Two shows, both sold out, 450 each show at \$75 a ticket.

"They asked to use my name and my image on the label for this special vintage. I'm not a wine expert, but, hey, this is the kind of promotion money can't buy."

In the two years since the threat of a breach of copyright suit over the unapproved use of one of Pavlo's compositions by American R&B/hip-hop megastar R. Kelly made headlines and netted the ambitious guitarist a fortune in royalties, his world has exploded.

With veteran Canadian talent manager B.C. Fiedler directing his career, and with his windfall as financial backing, Pavlo rocketed overnight from the obscurity of the far-flung county fairs and small town music conventions where he'd been flogging his homemade instrumental recordings for years, onto the world's stage, performing his trademark Mediterranean/Latin/Flamenco hybrid — often accompanied by more than a dozen musicians, as well as belly dancers, flamenco and salsa troupes — in Britain, the U.S., Europe and across Canada.

Next year his schedule is already jammed with 200 shows in 200 cities in 12 countries — including Korea, Japan and Australia — as well as his own live performance special



TARA WALTON/TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

Pavlo Meritage is to be launched Saturday following the guitarist's performance that night at Massey Hall.

on America's PBS, to be shot in January in Detroit by multi-Emmy winning concert and documentary producer/director George Veras, the canny marketer of some of the world's biggest selling concert DVDs (*Yanni: Live At The Acropolis*, *60's Pop Rock Reunion*, *Doo Wop At 50*).

The show, which Pavlo is financing and will own outright, airs in Michigan in March, and nationally in June.

"I've been working on this for years, it's a dream come true," said Pavlo, now 38. Last week he took part in a fundraising concert in Detroit for wildfire victims in Greece, and recently added guitar tracks to new songs for Australian pop star

Olivia Newton-John, being recorded in Toronto under the direction of producer Amy Sky.

"The PBS demographic is my target audience exactly. There's no one in North America doing what I'm doing.

"Out of necessity, I carved out my own little niche, based on my Pontic Greek origins. My grandfather was born in Turkey, and the music I grew up with reflects the fun-loving, hospitable and hard-working character of those people."

In tribute to those roots, Pavlo incorporates various unusual instruments into his show, including the lyre — an upright Greek violin that will be played at the Massey Hall show by a 21-year-old female vir-

tuoso, Parthena Aftthomianides, whom Pavlo stumbled on during a recent tour of his parent's native land — and the long-necked bouzouki, instruments he was once advised to abandoned because of their primitive ethnic implications.

"You stick with what you know," he said. "It's the way I've lived my life, and it seems to be paying off."

Just the facts

WHO: Pavlo

WHEN: Saturday, 8 p.m.

WHERE: Massey Hall, Victoria St. and Shuter St.

TICKETS: \$39.50 - \$59.50 at 416-872-4255 and roythomson.com