

a look at what's happening in and around the city

Pavlo's big fat Greek helping of Lady Luck

Fortunate accidents of fate for flamenco strummer



GRAHAM ROCKINGHAM

Pavlo Simtikidis has done pretty well for a guy who grew up amid the souvlaki pits of Toronto's Greek town.

Known as simply Pavlo when he's on stage with his band playing his nouveau Mediterranean meld — it's kind of a cross between flamenco and bouzouki music — he's fashioned himself a fairly lucrative international career.

Some of this is due to the fact that Pavlo is a hardworking and talented guitarist with a keen sense of how to make people enjoy themselves. If all else fails, he'll coax audience members up to the stage to dance with him.

He's also what some women might describe as a "hottie" — he's never short of dance partners.

But into every life a little good fortune must fall. And — to be honest — Pavlo has had more than his fair share. As a matter of fact, good fortune has passed his way so often you've got to wonder where he hides all those horseshoes. I mean some of them have to be really big horseshoes. For example:

Horseshoe No. 1: We'll call this "the stolen riff" horseshoe. It wasn't the first horseshoe thrown Pavlo's way and it probably won't be the last, but it's certainly the biggest.

A couple of years ago, Pavlo was listening to the radio when he heard rapper R. Kelly's latest smash hit. Kelly is the kind of lowlife megastar who would steal a guitar riff off somebody's album — not just the notes but the actual recording —

Showtime

Who: Pavlo

When: Friday, May 6, at 8 p.m.

Where: Hamilton Place Studio Theatre

Tickets: \$29.50 at Copps Coliseum box office or through Ticketmaster

loop it through one of his songs 27 times and figure he could get away without paying for it. That's just what Kelly did with the key motif off Pavlo's *Fantasia* (pronounced *Fantasia*). He put it on a song called *Fiesta* and then sold a few million copies of it. Kelly must have thought a no-name independent artist from Canada would never notice. Boy, was he wrong. As soon as Pavlo heard *Fiesta*, he hired a lawyer and threatened to take Kelly and his gawdawful collection of mink coats to the cleaners. Kelly magnanimously — yes, I'm being facetious — gave Pavlo 25 per cent of the royalties off the multi-million-selling song. So far, Pavlo has reaped \$700,000 from the deal.

"It's not something I ever had in my game plan," Pavlo says. "It just happened."

Horseshoe No. 2: This one's the "Lana Turner memorial horseshoe," for reasons to be explained later.

You've got to be in the right place at the right time. The time was August, the place was a retail convention in San Diego. Pavlo was performing there when a Wal-Mart vice-president took a liking to the show. He decided then and there that the world's biggest retail chain should stock this relatively obscure Canadian guitarist.

Pavlo released his 1999 Canadian CD *Fantasia* in the United States and then, two months ago, started touring Wal-Mart stores, flashing his Mediterranean Eyes (it's a song) and serenading all those middle American shoppers with red-hot flamenco. The tour helped flame the album on 50 smooth jazz stations in the U.S. and pushed it to No. 6 on Bill-



HAMILTON SPECTATOR FILE PHOTO

Pavlo Simtikidis (simply Pavlo when he's on stage) is hardworking and talented but he's also had some luck along the way.

board's world music chart. It quickly fell off the chart when the tour ended, but expect it back on soon. Pavlo is touring another string of U.S. Wal-Marts this week.

"Wal-Mart normally carries only top-40 stuff," Pavlo says. "It's unprecedented that they actually got behind me, an instrumental artist from Canada, of all places."

Unprecedented and really lucky — the musical equivalent, perhaps, of Lana Turner getting discovered serving sodas at a Hollywood ice cream parlour.

Horseshoe No. 3: This is the "You can't be stupid if you're this naive" horseshoe and it explains how Pavlo got one of the top managers in the country to launch his career.

The year was 1998. Pavlo was fairly new to the music business, having just made his first self-produced record. He was looking for places to play, not an easy task for a guy who plays a flamenco guitar like it was a bouzouki.

"I opened up the paper one day and saw that Gordon Lightfoot was playing Massey Hall," he laughs. "I said 'OK, I think we might share the same demographic'"

Not realizing that Lightfoot hadn't performed with an opening act in 16 years, Pavlo picked up the phone and

called Lightfoot's office.

Barry Harvey, Lightfoot's crusty righthand man, took the call and, to his credit, didn't laugh at the brash young man on the other end of the line. He even offered to listen to a CD that Pavlo delivered in person 30 minutes later. Harvey passed it to Lightfoot's other manager, Bernie Fiedler, who the very next week offered to take on Pavlo as a client.

Pavlo never got to play with Lightfoot, but he did get a national tour opening for Fiedler's other client, Liona Boyd.

Horseshoe to come: If it happens, it'll be called the "big fat Greek horseshoe." The father of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* star Nia Vardalos took in one of Pavlo's shows and, just like the Wal-Mart guy, took a shine to the music.

He introduced Pavlo to his movie star daughter and the two have struck up a great friendship. If his luck holds, Pavlo will be on the soundtrack of her next movie, maybe even have a cameo role.

But don't forget none of this would have happened if Pavlo wasn't a good guitarist ... with Mediterranean Eyes ... who likes to dance.

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