

Lifestyle



In this photo Ghost Radio station host Jack Watcharaphon's decorations and ghost-themed toys are displayed in his studio in Bangkok.—AFP photos



In this photo guests listen to the live show of Ghost Radio station host Jack Watcharaphon at his Ghost House cafe in Bangkok.



In this photo a man smokes a cigarette outside the Ghost House cafe, owned by Ghost Radio station host Jack Watcharaphon, in Bangkok.

# Ghosts in their machines: Thai livestream spooks a new generation

It is almost midnight, and above a semi-abandoned Bangkok shopping centre, Ghost Radio is on air.

Rapid-fire comments ping across the studio's screens as thousands tune in online to hear callers describe their encounters with Thailand's supernatural.

Belief in spirits runs deep in the kingdom, which has a celebrated canon of ghosts from individuals like Mae Nak, a woman who haunted her village after dying in childbirth, to more sinister creatures like krasue -- bodiless women who float through the night looking to devour flesh.

Now these ancient tales are being reinvigorated through online platforms like YouTube, TikTok, WhatsApp and even delivery app Grab.

"She met a man in a white suit who told her that her time was up, and that she had to go with him," the first caller recounts, her voice quivering.

"But when she turned back, she could see her body lying in bed."

In the studio, host Watcharapol Fukjaidee listens patiently, gently prying out details.

The charismatic 46-year-old, also known by his nickname Jack, films two live episodes a week from 11 pm to dawn, fielding calls from spooked Thais as millions tune in and thousands comment online. "When there is more technology, the chance to see ghosts increases," he tells AFP.

"Ghosts come with apps, chat lines, phone calls. Technology becomes the channel where they can contact people," Watcharapol recounted, asking him to meet at a temple, but when he got there he made a chilling discovery.

"It turns out that his friend had died and his phone was put into the coffin," he says, raising his eyebrows, a mischievous chuckle lurking.

## Ghostly meet-ups

The host got his break 20 years ago under Thailand's "godfather of ghosts" Kapol Thongplub, whose late-night call-in show was a favourite with the capital's taxi drivers.

It is now food delivery riders rather than cabbies who frequently encounter the supernatural as they endlessly crisscross Bangkok at all hours, Watcharapol says.



In this photo Ghost Radio station host Jack Watcharaphon broadcasts live from his studio in Bangkok.

And unlike Kapol's show, which was dominated by the host's larger-than-life reactions, Watcharapol is more low-key and a little tongue-in-cheek.

"Now with the influence of Twitter and TikTok, more young people call," says Ghost Radio worker Khemjira Jongkolsapaporn.

There has been a shift, with audiences now wanting to not only be scared, and then soothed -- but also entertained.

"This isn't a matter of 'still believing' or not," cultural anthropologist Andrew Alan Johnson, whose book "Ghosts of the New City" examines how recent events have reshaped Thai beliefs, told AFP.

"Ghosts become a way to tell stories that are



In this photo decorations of decapitated heads and bloody limbs are displayed at the Ghost House cafe.



In this photo Ghost Radio station production assistants check comments from listeners at the studio in Bangkok.

denied elsewhere," he said.

This is especially true in rapidly changing Bangkok, Johnson said, where ghost tales help preserve local memory -- explaining unlucky locations, or feelings of alienation.

"Folk belief is incredibly adaptable, in that it seeks to speak to people's everyday experiences," he said. The Ghost Radio YouTube channel has almost three million subscribers and is sponsored by various local firms as well as pulling income from the themed cafe on the ground floor.

Watched over by an eclectic collection of ghost-themed toys, Khemjira sifts through scores of submissions, weeding out political stories or



In this photo a family visit the Ghost House cafe, owned by Ghost Radio station host Jack Watcharaphon, in Bangkok.

anything that might touch the kingdom's tough laws against insulting the monarchy.

Not every tale makes it on air, but Khemjira is confident the people telling them believe them to be true. "I think people meet ghosts a lot. We hardly ever hear the same story," she says.

## 'Scared to death'

As Watcharapol listens upstairs, downstairs his cafe is raucous with young fans and families.

Munching on a tombstone-shaped brownie, 25-year-old policeman and regular caller Chalwat Thungood explained how he shares his colleagues' tales.

His own spooky experience came on a call out to a house. As he arrived he glimpsed the shadow of an overweight man walk into a bathroom.

He struggled to open the door -- until suddenly it gave way. "I found a big man who had been dead for at least five hours. It proved to me that I saw a spirit of the big man walking into the bathroom," he said. "I 100 percent believe that ghosts exist."

Watcharapol refuses to be drawn on whether he actually believes, stating he has to maintain an open mind before admitting he is "scared to death" of hospital ghosts. People tune in to his show, he says, to find a like-minded community "because sometimes they can't speak to their family about their ghostly experiences". —AFP

## Pioneering composer and eco-warrior Ryuichi Sakamoto dies aged 71

Pioneering composer and green activist Ryuichi Sakamoto, whose score for "The Last Emperor" scooped an Oscar and a Grammy, has died aged 71 after his second cancer diagnosis.

Having shot to fame in the 1970s with the influential Japanese group Yellow Magic Orchestra, Sakamoto's electronic innovations helped lay the foundations for synth-pop, house music and hip-hop. But he was perhaps best known for his film soundtracks, including for the World War II drama "Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence", in which he also acted opposite his friend David Bowie as a prisoner-of-war camp commandant.

The hauntingly catchy track "Forbidden Colours" from the 1983 film, with vocals by David Sylvian, became a global hit for Sakamoto, who also collaborated with Thomas Dolby and punk legend Iggy Pop in the 80s.

Sakamoto went on to win an Academy Award with his score for the 1987 period epic "The Last Emperor", directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, which



This file photo taken on October 4, 2018 shows Japanese musician Ryuichi Sakamoto walking on the red carpet during the opening ceremony of the 23rd Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) in Busan. —AFP photos

tells the story of China's last emperor Puyi.

He lived in New York for decades, but his prolific career made him a huge star in his home country, where he was renowned for his strident anti-nuclear campaigning.

Despite his recent ill health -- he survived throat cancer in 2014 -- Sakamoto continued to win acclaim for his work, including the score for Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu's 2015 film "The Revenant".

In early 2021, the musician said he was undergoing treatment for rectal cancer.

His management team announced Sunday that he died on March 28th, and a funeral was

held for close family only, at his request.

"We would like to share one of Sakamoto's favourite quotes: 'Ars longa, vita brevis. Art is long, life is short,'" the team said in a statement.

## 'The Professor'

Born in Tokyo in 1952, Sakamoto grew up immersed in the arts, as his father was a literary editor for some of Japan's greatest novelists, including Nobel laureate Kenzaburo Oe.

He discovered the piano at a young age, and has said Bach, Haydn and Debussy fascinated him as a teenager as much as the Beatles and Rolling Stones. He studied composition and ethnomusicology at university -- earning him the affectionate nickname "The Professor" in Japan -- and began performing in Tokyo's burgeoning 1970s electronic scene.

"I was working with the computer at university and playing jazz in the daytime, buying West Coast psychedelic and early Kraftwerk records in the afternoon, and playing folk at night," he told The Guardian in 2018.

"I was quite busy!" In 1978, he co-founded Yellow Magic Orchestra (YMO) with Haruomi Hosono and Yukihiro Takahashi, who died in January.

Their high-energy techno-pop had an enormous influence on electronic music worldwide, and inspired the synthesised melodies of early Japanese video games. Groundbreaking US hip-hop artist Afrika Bambaataa sampled YMO in the 80s, and some of the Japanese group's songs became international hits -- including "Behind the Mask", which inspired cover versions by Michael Jackson and Eric Clapton.

After YMO disbanded in 1983, Sakamoto dedicated himself to solo projects, exploring multiple musical styles from prog rock and ambient to rap, bossa nova and contemporary classical.

He racked up collaborations with avant-garde artists, but also with stars from around the world like Cape Verde singer Cesaria Evora, Brazil's Caetano Veloso, and Senegalese sensation Youssou N'Dour.

"I want to be a citizen of the world," Sakamoto, who moved to New York in the 1990s, once said. "It sounds very hippie but I like that."

Numerous musicians paid tribute Sunday including indie pop outfit Japanese Breakfast, American musician and producer Questlove, and former Smiths guitarist Johnny Marr, who on Twitter hailed Sakamoto as "an elegant and timeless artist." —AFP



Martin Scorsese and Leonardo DiCaprio

## Scorsese, DiCaprio to premiere new film at Cannes

Martin Scorsese's new film starring Leonardo DiCaprio, "Killers of the Flower Moon", will get its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival on May 20, organisers confirmed on Friday.

It will be the first time the veteran filmmaker presents a new film at the festival since he won best director there in 1986 for "After Hours".

Scorsese won the top Palme d'Or prize in 1976 for "Taxi Driver" and also presided over the jury in 1998.

"The Cannes Festival is overjoyed to welcome Martin Scorsese this May on the Croisette, to climb the steps of the Palais des Festivals," the organisers said in a statement.

The film, also starring Robert De Niro, was produced by Apple, which has agreed to release it in cinemas in October prior to streaming on its platform.

Cannes only allows films to compete for the Palme d'Or if they get a theatrical release, which has notably prevented Netflix from entering its films.

"Killers of the Flower Moon" tracks the true story of serial murders of a Native American tribe in an oil-rich part of the United States in the 1920s. —AFP



This file photo taken on June 7, 1996 shows Japanese composer, singer, songwriter, and record producer Ryuichi Sakamoto posing during a portrait session in Paris.