

**ARTS & CULTURE**

# Hip-hop Music on the Rise in Thailand

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New York City, the birthplace of hip-hop music, is thousands of kilometers away and, culturally, very different from northeastern Thailand.

But for Thai **rapper** RachYo, the language of hip hop is universal.

The 18-year-old artist appears in a recent music video recorded in a rice field. RachYo is sitting on an old truck, rapping about trouble in a love relationship. The video has 57 million views on YouTube.

“I rap about things that really happen to me,” RachYo told the Reuters news agency. Based in Thailand’s Nakhon Ratchasima province, the rapper says he mostly sings about girls.

The rising popularity of hip hop in Thailand has created stars that have drawn the attention of music industry leaders.

Def Jam Recordings is the main hip hop **label** of Universal Music Group, or UMG, one of the world’s three major music corporations. Def Jam produces and publishes the work of some of the most popular hip-hop artists in the United States, including Rihanna, 2 Chainz and Kanye West. Last year it opened offices in Thailand and Singapore.

One of the first artists the company employed after expanding there was Thai rapper DaBoyWay. DaBoyWay has 1 million followers on the social media service Instagram, and is releasing a new album on Monday. Def Jam has also made agreements with five others from Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Paul Sirisant heads the label’s operations in Bangkok. He says Def Jam plans to employ four more Thai artists this year.

Sirisant noted Thai artists stand out from others in Southeast Asia because the language already includes sounds that rhyme in daily speech. Rhyming, or using words or phrases that end in the same sounds, is a major **element** of hip-hop. So rapping in Thai sounds natural, he says.

The music has spread outside the nation’s major cities.

“Thailand has already **tipped** in a big way - it’s the **paddy** fields and hip hop,” Sirisant said. He adds that highly successful rappers can earn millions of dollars in Thailand.

In 2018, Thai media company Broadcaster Workpoint Entertainment launched a television program called *The Rapper*. Non-professional performers compete in the show to become the next rap star. The popularity of *The Rapper* helped connect the public and hip hop.

A group called Rap Against Dictatorship released a song in 2018 that received millions of views on YouTube. The song included the **lyric** “either eat the truth or bullets,” and criticized the military rule of the country. That rule ended in 2019.

Other new rap in Thailand comes from 19Tyger and H3NRI. Their song, *Klong Toey* is about life in a poor Bangkok neighborhood of the same name.

Maya Piyapan, 23, says his hip hop group, WARPGVNG, met over the internet and has members from across the country. The group, which will perform on January 31, raps about about getting into trouble and problems fame can cause among friends.

“Labels have reached out to me to help with production and content, but not as an artist” said Maya.

Production agreements, or record deals, are the dream for many artists, but not for RachYo. His recent video *Nok*, the Thai word for bird, received 80 million YouTube views, more than Thailand’s population of nearly 70 million.

He says he raps to express himself, but he is not interested in a record deal with a label.

“I like being home, in the country. I don’t really like to go anywhere,” he said.

I’m Pete Musto.

*Chayut Setboonsarng reported this story for the Reuters news agency. Pete Musto adapted it for VOA Learning English. Caty Weaver was the editor. Write to us in the Comments Section or on our Facebook page.*

## Words in This Story

**rapper** – *n.* a person who performs hip hop music, a kind of music that has words that are spoken with the rhythm instead of being sung

**label** – *n.* a company that produces musical recordings

**element** – *n.* a particular part of something, such as a situation or activity

**tip(ped)** – *v.* to change a situation so that something is more likely to happen

**paddy** – *n.* a wet field where rice is grown

**lyric** – *n.* the words of a song

