

Childhood superstar grows up

Montonn Jira is one of the most recognizable Thai celebrities around. Adored by women, envied by men and renowned for having more than one string on his bow, Jay is an accomplished model, actor, musician and DJ.

Halloween will see Jay make a rare trip to Phuket to play one of his unique music sets at Club Lime. Matt Crook speaks to Thailand's hottest commodity, fresh off a world tour opening with Kenna for Justin Timberlake.



"Jay" Montonn Jira (left) goofs around with bandmates while on tour in the US with American electronica-musician Kenna. Jay is now back in Thailand performing DJ gigs and making music in his home studio.

Born in Hong Kong in 1978, it wasn't until nearly 10 years later in 1987 that *look kreung* Jay moved to Thailand with his family.

At the tender age of nine years old, Jay got his first glimpse of fame winning a school "Domon Mini" talent contest by throwing together some breakdance moves.

Two years later and he was doing fashion shoots for Praew magazine, Tur Kub Chun magazine and Benetton.

At 13 years old, Jay first picked up a guitar, continued modeling, competed professionally on television gameshows and starred in numerous TV commercials.

Epitomizing everything about childhood stardom,

Jay was awarded the Bangkok Post's star of the year award in 1995.

In the late 90s, Jay worked on his first movie, *Mean Street Blues*, released his first album (which went gold), and moved to California to study music and electronics. There isn't a route to stardom he hasn't tried his hand at.

Jay moved a step closer to the big time when he started working with American electronica-artist Kenna as a keyboard and bass player. "I've been playing with Kenna since 2002.

"The first record came out in 2003 under Sony Music and Columbia Records.

"A band mate of mine from university, Max Hart, was playing with Kenna's band and he needed a replacement.

"At the time, I was working in sound design at the Paramount and Disney studios in Hollywood, and wanted to move more towards working in music. I decided I'd give it a try, and joined the band shortly after," said Jay.

Jay jumped into a two-month touring schedule with Kenna, opening for Depeche Mode frontman Dave Gahan. Kenna and the band also played with Fiction Plane (Sting's son Joe Sumner's band) and electro-clash stars Fischerspooner.

Jay was the musical director for Kenna. He did the programming for live shows and handled most of the synthesis programming and technicalities for playback.

Jay isn't just a pretty face - he's a workhorse, playing close to 70 shows across the USA and UK between March and August this year, which has paid dividends when you look at the talent he has been working with.

Most recently, Jay and Kenna were touring across the US and the UK with the likes of Nelly Furtado, She Wants Revenge and the Prince of Pop Justin Timberlake. "We also played a few festivals, like South by Southwest, the X-Games LA, Live Earth NY and the MTV Campus Invasion," said Jay.

"It was good experience getting to see how Justin [Timberlake] runs his show. More than just seeing how he worked, it was good to get to see how his team worked. He's an

extremely talented artist and can definitely hold his own as a performer. We'd get to chat in between sound checks, but other than that we didn't hang out much. He had his girlfriend out with him and I'm sure he was tending to her," said Jay.

Now back in Thailand after traveling around the world, Jay is busy working on other projects. "I've put together a home studio with gear that I've been purchasing over the last few years. I want to work on a few solo projects and lots of remixes hopefully.

"I plan to get into writing TV music with friends from LA. I'm also doing mixing work for local bands looking for a different sound," said Jay.

"It's nice to have all my belongings in one place now and not have to pay rent in New York while I'm not there. I'm sure I'll continue to travel back and forth, but I will probably spend the majority of my time (while not tour-

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“Jay” Montonn Jira (right) toured the US and the UK opening for the likes of Justin Timberlake and Nelly Furtado.

ing or working) here in Thailand,” Jay added.

One of Jay’s most popular projects is Katsue with fellow *look kreung* heartthrob Joni Anwar, who shot to fame as a child star in the boyband Raptor.

As Katsue, the pair produced one of the most creative, innovative LPs by Thai artists in recent years. *And So it Goes...* is an electronic, down-tempo album that has Jay’s production expertise all over it.

“There will definitely be lots more Katsue albums to come. We will be playing with Coldcut in Bangkok in December. We’ll be doing a short set opening for them at 808, the new club where Astra used to be in RCA,” said Jay.

As well as solo projects and collaborations with other artists, Jay is an accomplished composer of movie scores.

“The last piece I did was for an Italian film called *Cactus*. I believe it was just played at the International Film Festival in Milan. It was also played earlier this year at the Galway Film Fleadh in Ireland.

As one of the few Thai artists to have achieved success both in and outside of Thailand, Jay is reluctant to consider himself an inter-national performer.

“You always hear talk about local celebrities trying to ‘go inter-’,” said Jay, who added that he doesn’t see himself as flying the flag for Thailand because his music isn’t typically Thai and most people in Thailand don’t know much about his work abroad.

“It’s hard to talk about the music scene in Thailand. I don’t

feel like there is a scene here. It’s just a lot of people trying to imitate scenes from abroad. Hopefully there’ll be a shift in the local music scene and some new, exciting music will come out. I’ll keep my fingers crossed,” said Jay.

There was a time when Jay couldn’t leave his house without hordes of screaming fans chasing him down the street. Although those days are long gone, they still live on in many people’s memories.

“I think it really depends on how much people have kept up with the work I’ve done how they see me. For those who haven’t, they’ll probably always remember me from my childhood ice cream commercials.

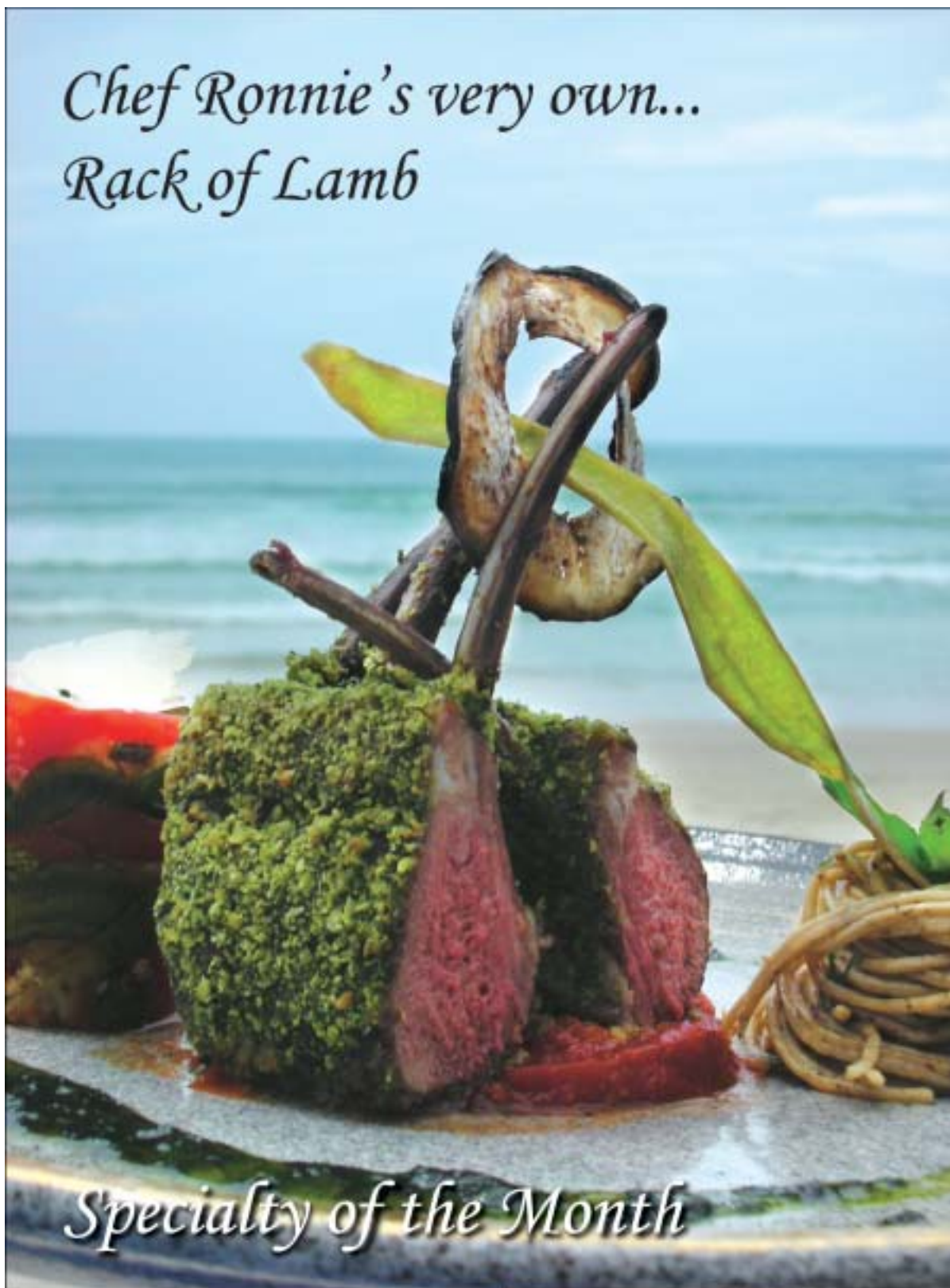
“People in the US really know me from my work with Kenna, so they have a different perception of who I am,” said Jay.

Jay is one of the only Thai performers championing minimal-techno music in Thailand. His live DJ sets have been in high demand in Bangkok.

On Wednesday October 31, Jay will be in Phuket with his iBook full of tricks to play an intimate gig at Club Lime on the beach road (300-baht entry with two bottles of Heineken).

“I’m excited about coming to Phuket. I don’t really know how people will react to the music,” said Jay.

For more information about “Jay” Montonn Jira visit www.montonn.com or www.myspace.com/montonnjira For more information about Club Lime visit www.clublime.info




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