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Music

The 79 Best K-Pop Songs of 2022

According to 79 journalists and pop culture writers.

BY TEEN VOGUE

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The best K-pop songs of 2022 took us on a journey through girl group supremacy, glitch modes and hype boys, memories of the past, and visions for the future.

As we've written **in the past**, K-pop isn't a monolithic genre — the same way American pop can encompass a variety of performers and sounds, so too can K-pop. Slow and whispery, intergalactic and frenzied, five songs crammed into one or a ballad so moving and plaintive it'll make you cry.

In the third year of this Best K-Pop list, 79 journalists and critics chose songs that spoke to them and the world around them. Some outlined the most unique, bombastic side of what K-pop's genre mash-up can sound like. Others celebrated the year's surge of rookie 4th-gen **girl groups** that have **dominated charts** and playlists this year. Still others highlighted the indie innovators and b-sides that added depth and dynamite to Korean pop music in a way that will last for years to come. What a time to be alive.

Below, discover the best K-pop songs of 2022 in no particular order, root for your faves, and maybe pick up a new song or two to add to your rotation.

NewJeans, "Hype Boy"

Surprise drops are rare in K-pop, and even more so are surprise group debuts. NewJeans, the first girl group under HYBE subsidiary ADOR, pulled off the bit with a sound as cool as their mid-2000s style, appearing like a fresh *Stuck in the Suburbs*-esque mirage in a year when new girl groups were already taking over. As July faded into August, we got to know NewJeans through seven music videos in one week — four of which told the story of "Hype Boy" through alternating mini narratives, as the members played characters who each experienced first heartbreaks and romantic dalliances. It was a sweet trick, and the dynamic nature of NewJeans was cemented with the song itself — vibey and fun, nostalgic yet new, with sick little beats and production sounds. There's a reason everyone can't stop listening to, **and covering**, the track: "You're my chemical hype boy" shifted something in our collective brain. —*P. Claire Dodson, senior entertainment editor at Teen Vogue*

Psy and Suga, "That That"

Come hither... it's the return of the king. Psy, aka Park Jaesang, aka the artist responsible for K-pop's first major American breakthrough in 2012, came back with a dopamine hit of a song earlier this year. Psy saunters through saloon doors with "That That," a jubilant, trot-influenced bop and post-lockdown celebration, produced by and featuring BTS's Suga. The accompanying music video is one of 2022's most memorable, featuring a cradled "Gangnam Style" era Psy, stuntman Suga leaping into a rap battle with an eagle's cry, and some truly unrelenting choreography. Psy never lost it, but "That That" proves why he remains an industry icon. —*Katie Goh, culture journalist*

Seventeen, "Ash"

Title tracks get all the love, praise, and attention in the world of K-pop, but B-sides are where the hidden gems continually reside. Case in point: SEVENTEEN's "Ash," the triumphant outro for the group's long-anticipated fourth studio album, *Face The Sun*, which also served as a thematic bridge for its repackage, *Sector 17*. Back in May, **when I reviewed the full album**, I said SVT shine brightest when they get experimental, and this song is the perfect example. Mixing elements of hip-hop, trap, and electronica, the autotune-heavy track is unlike any other OT13 SVT release — and it doesn't need to be. It's a breath of fresh air, it's unbridled, and it showed fans that, even seven-plus years into their career, SVT still has **many facets they still haven't fully shown off**. —*Sara Delgado, contributing editor at Teen Vogue and freelance writer*

IVE, "Love Dive"

Solidifying their spot as K-pop's monster rookies, IVE reinforced with "Love Dive" that they are here to stay. The girls are confident and bold with their concept, and it's not a surprise that IVE have dominated the charts this year. You can't write a Best Songs of 2022 list without including "Love Dive," or any of their title tracks for that matter. Like sirens, the sextet entice listeners with their velvety vocals. Seriously, I can't count how many times a day I randomly sing "narcissistic, my God I love it." Taking a modern spin on Greek mythology, "Love Dive" is about falling in love with one's reflection (or yourself, depending on your interpretation). Not to mention, the music video also features the members wearing **that** Miu Miu set from the SS22 collection that was all over your social media feeds, feeding the fashion enthusiasts. —*Bashirat Oladele, culture writer*

Stray Kids, "Charmer"

Queue up "Charmer" by Stray Kids, and listen to the way Lee Know sings "you can't resist it." He serpentine around the beat, his voice mesmerizing and unperturbed, luring you into a state of aural hypnosis. "You'll dance to my spell," he purrs. Hubris has never sounded so irresistible. A beguiling b-side off the group's Billboard no. 1 album *Oddinary*, "Charmer" evokes the flute-like sound of a pungi, an Indian folk instrument used by snake charmers, to create an enticing hook over trap hi-hats, bursts of bass, and a repeated falling scale. Its real allure lies in the members' bravura — Hyunjin's saucy "I'm the charmer"; Changbin's sibilant whispers; and Felix's final, sonorous siren call. It's Stray Kids at their most potent: bold, unapologetic, and fully harnessing their charms.

—*Crystal Bell*, digital culture editor at Mashable

BTS, "Run BTS"

No other comeback has demonstrated artistic agility this year quite like BTS's "Run BTS." The hip-hop song features all the most unique qualities of these supernovas: nimble lyricism, complex choreography, and addictive levels of energy. It's coherent, with one wild, infectious guitar riff that helps listeners focus on the lyrics as BTS tell us the story of their career. Suga is a standout, absolutely **dog-walking the mic**, but the track and performance play to each member's strengths. And on the last album for this particular era, it's a reminder of who they are as a team — ambitious **disruptors** who have been sprinting towards the very top of the world for a decade. —*Steffi Cao, Internet Culture Reporter at BuzzFeed News*

LE SSERAFIM, "Antifragile"

“ANTIFRAGILE”? More like antidepressant. That’s what this bass-thumping, serotonin-producing, twerk-inducing bop by LE SSERAFIM does to you. From the moment you hear the intro, to the second the beat drops right before Chaewon sings her first line with sass, “ANTIFRAGILE” is a highly caffeinated track with boundless energy. The song’s electrifying reggaeton-inspired beat and fun choreo creates a perfect synergy on top of the group’s dynamic — refreshing, real and indestructible. What’s even better is how every member — Chaewon, Sakura, Yunjin, Kazuha and Eunchae — shines individually and just “pours more gasoline” on this fiery track to fuel it to the max. With that being said, are you team “Anti-ti-ti-ti-fragile (fragile)” or “Lovey, lovey, lovey, dovey, dovey, dovey”? — *Lai Frances*, multimedia journalist & producer at UPROXX

Jin, "The Astronaut"

Before he enlisted for South Korea's mandatory military duty earlier this week, Jin recorded "The Astronaut" for *his* ARMY. Co-written with Coldplay, the song is a lush pop creation that showcases the BTS member's vocal range and emotive qualities. Jin has explored the universe paradigm in his music previously ("Moon"), but knowing that it will be another 18 months before he returns as a civilian makes this release both precious and bittersweet. Jin has always had the ability to express vulnerability in songs like the glorious "Epiphany." But here, he also exhibits defiant strength, promising listeners, "*You and me, a never ending history.*" — *Jae-Ha Kim, Syndicated Columnist at the Chicago Tribune*

Nayeon ft. Wonstein, "Love Countdown"

TWICE's Nayeon has had one hell of a 2022 thanks to her self-titled debut summer EP *Im Nayeon*. While everyone online has been fixated on Nayeon's "Pop," the lead single on the EP, or **her startling similarity to Chlöe Bailey**, the song that's lived in my head rent free all year since its release? "Love Countdown" featuring *Show Me the Money* alum, Wonstein. I love Wonstein. He's a supremely talented rapper that breathes new life into any track he's on and effortlessly matches the artists with whom he's collaborating. "Love Countdown" is no exception. The song is a catchy, summery bop where the duo sing (and rap, in Wonstein's case) at each other in a strong, straightforward love song about not wanting to wait for the one they love. Their voices complement each other perfectly. Every time I hear this song — and I hear it a LOT because it's on all of my writing playlists — I have to sing along because it was the main track on the soundtrack of my summer. —*Stitch, pop culture and fandom writer*

Kep1er, "Wa Da Da"

With their supercharged sugar rush of a debut song, “Wa Da Da,” rookie girl group Kep1er had fans and celebs alike clamoring to learn its infectious choreography that has a bit of everything: bad-ass foot stomping, squishy aegyo hands, and elaborate thumb-fiddling. Likewise, the song’s production is gloriously maximalist, as futuristic synths morph into a chorus of pummeling drums and ripping race-track sounds, brightened up by twinkling bells. At once determined and cheery, the 9-member group sings of racing toward their dreams using the cartoonish onomatopoeia, “*wa da da*” — proving that you don’t have to sacrifice cuteness in your quest to the top. —*Michelle Hyun Kim, music journalist and critic*

NCT 127, "Two Baddies"

Fast and furious, the title track from NCT 127's fourth studio album kicks off in high-octane spirit — engines rev, exploding in the harmonized vocal chant of the chorus: "Two baddies, two baddies, one Porsche." Later: "Now you wanna ride these wheels?" leader Taeyong not so much asks but demands. On the surface, this hypermasculine electro hip-hop-pop, with its driving synth production and mechanical concept, runs the risk of distracting from its message: getaway cars are metaphors for escapism, for freedom. On "2 Baddies," the NCT sub-unit seeks liberation: zero to 100 on the highest speed, forward mobility and success in the face of adversity. It's a reminder that the best motivation — the greatest gasoline — comes from within. —*Maria Sherman, author of [Larger Than Life: A History of Boy Bands from NKOTB to BTS](#)*

BLACKPINK, "Typa Girl"

Remember when Facebook statuses were for posting lyrics that sum up your emotions at any given moment? Well, I deleted my Facebook years ago, but I wish I still had it so I could put "Typa girl that you wish for when you blow that candle out" or "Both my body and my bank account, good figure" as my status. Sure, I could make these incredible instances of BLACKPINK's signature sassy-yet-genius wordplay as Instagram captions. They just wouldn't hit the same, though. "Typa Girl" could be easily perceived as toxic with its riff off the classic line, "I'm not like the other girls." However, I consider "Typa Girl" to be two minutes and 59 seconds of affirmations. When I need to remember I'm *that girl*, particularly after crying for 45 minutes straight in therapy, I put it on. Or when I am feeling like *that girl*, it's just the song that I need to amplify my confident vibes and get me dancing around. "Typa Girl" truly never fails to remind me that I'm doing amazing things by just being myself. —*Devon Abelman, freelance writer*

Monsta X, "Love"

Let's be honest. We all have a late '90s and early 2000s playlist we put on repeat as we nostalgically yearn for simpler times. In 2022, Monsta X took us back but with a modern twist. "Love," produced by member Joohoney, layers elements of old-school hip hop, R&B, and pop with the excitement of modern K-pop and Monsta X's unique edge. Their signature smooth vocals and charismatic raps move us through bouncy verses, upbeat choruses, and an unforgettable breakdown, complete with a saxophone. From Hyungwon's chill-inducing opening line to Kihyun's final note, what's not to love? — *Donya Momenian, fashion and beauty associate editor, Teen Vogue*

SEVENTEEN, "Hot"

To say that I adore that “Hot” with the fire of a thousand suns would be a gross understatement. The song is a pure example of hip-hop meets K-pop done right — 808s, beat-boxing, and effortless sexy swagger, but sprinkle in that intense choreography that leaves no room for doubt as to why these 13 men have been declared the most synchronized group in K-pop. And while SEVENTEEN has released songs this year that could easily push anyone down the Carat rabbit hole (I mean have you heard “Cheers,” “Ash,” or “bout you”), “Hot” is the song that grips you by the back of your neck, looks you dead in the eye and declares “I’m the captain now.” —*Natasha Mulenga, author, producer, and journalist*

CHANMINA, "Mirror"

The past few years have seen a major early 2000s pop-punk resurgence, emphasized by the likes of Olivia Rodrigo's smash hit "Good 4 U" and the long-awaited return of Avril Lavigne to her emo roots. On "Mirror," CHANMINA makes the pop-rock genre her own, putting her playful bubblegum spin on angsty young love. Backed by a hyper-colorful music video that plays like a Y2K rom-com with a twist, the Korean-Japanese rapper and pop star's 2022 single is an explosive fusion that blends pop, rock, and punk, with lyrics sung in both English and Korean. The result is an attitude-laden, instantly catchy piece of ear candy that features one of the stickiest hooks of the year: *"I said ohh, you look so good..."* —*Erica Russell, entertainment editor*

RM feat. Anderson .Paak, "Still Life"

"Still Life" by RM with Anderson .Paak is partially inspired by the common practice of painters titling their work "Still Life." In an interview with Zach Sang, RM explains, "I'm thinking [of] myself, that my whole life is an exhibition and I may be just a flower or an apple in a painting, but I'm still moving forward and I'm still alive." It's the second track off of his recently released debut solo album, *Indigo*, and the song can only be described as the immaculate unionization of RM and a pre-Silk Sonic Anderson .Paak. Laced with the perfect amount of funk and keyboard, it's an unexpected anthem for better days with lines like "I'm still life, *but I'm movin*" and "Errday is my day one, brother." —*Bora, freelance writer and host of [Hwaiting Words](#) podcast*

NMIXX, "Dice"

Since their debut in January, it's been apparent that NMIXX's eclectic approach to dramatic, over-the-top pop isn't for everyone, with music that's divisive as it is excellent. But their second single, September's "Dice," is perhaps one of the brightest moments of the year when it comes to K-pop ingenuity, as it throws caution to the wind and revels in musical whimsy. In a span of two minutes and 46 seconds, this beautifully chaotic, pint-sized blend of genres (staccatoed trap and brassy jazz play major roles) clashes gracefully with a medley of sound effects like creaking doors and haunting cackles. All of the musical effects swerve and stop short amid belting vocals and bold, chanting raps. "Don't fall asleep no more/ you should come on board," declare Bae and Jiwoo, as if imploring listeners to wake up to the song's addictively festive nature. —*Tamar Herman, writer*

TXT, "Trust Fund Baby"

If TXT is governed by one dream, then “Trust Fund Baby” is an earnest admission that dreams without resource and resolve are merely delusions of grandeur. The quintet’s individual vocal colors unite to imbue this indie pop ballad with a kaleidoscope of wistfulness. Intimate melancholy is a playground on which TXT’s versatility runs free, and “Trust Fund Baby” definitely sits with “Anti-Romantic” at the lunch table. (The entire EP is masterful, but I must stick to my brief). **Taehyun mentioned** at the *minisode 2: Thursday’s Child* press conference that he took inspiration from playing games, and his envy that people with money could pay their way forward. Those born with a silver spoon in their mouth inherit the luxury of guaranteed respawning, all doors open to them, never meeting a “game over,” against those who would have finite funds to conquer even an arcade claw machine. “Trust Fund Baby” is a testament to TXT’s pairing of the resources available to them, with their unrivaled resolve, to be where they are today, turning heartbreak into growth. That’s *so* Tubatu. — *K-Ci Williams, entertainment writer*

Kwon Eun Bi, "Glitch"

Kwon Eun Bi's effortlessly suave demeanor served her well in her tenure as IZ*ONE's multi-talented leader, but through her recent solo efforts Eun Bi shines even more as a pillar of elegance amongst chaos. "Glitch" is an exhilarating example of her crystal clear confidence, a techno whirl of sudden stops and glistening starts led by Eun Bi's precise, striking vocal inflections. In "Glitch," imperfections are embraced and wielded in dramatically intensifying ways: "I might appear anywhere / Stay on your toes / I'm everywhere now," she teases, guiding the music into a breathless calamity of shuffled hi-hats, dipping bass lines, and shimmering vocal echoes. There's a surprise around every verse and chorus here, so I won't spoil what comes next — Eun Bi will lead you the rest of the way through, even if you lose track of her. —*Rachel Saywitz, freelance music critic*

BTS, "Yet to Come"

What better way to run into a new era than with open, optimistic arms? To others, BTS's break from group activities and anthology release *Proof* might indicate an end, but to ARMY, "Yet to Come" — and its joyful lyrics drenched in love — is just another reason why we'll always be together. Featuring a triumphant music video showcasing prosperity growing from the darker themes of their nine years of work, "Yet to Come" reminds us that though our best memories are in the past, we'll still have beautiful moments in the future. That our best moments won't end with our youth. —*Jade Song*, author of *CHLORINE*

NewJeans, "Attention"

NewJeans unexpectedly stepped on the K-pop scene this year with their hot debut song "Attention," which brought back the 2000s and provided a fresh sound that K-pop fans have been craving. Not only was this pop hit with an R&B flare the talk of the K-pop community for several months, but the choreography has lived on over the past few months of virality — no one could stop dancing and singing to this addictive bop, including Korean celebrities such as BIBI, Hanbin, ENHYPEN, BTS, and many others. With this strong debut, NewJeans have made it clear they did not come to play. —*Asia Moore, freelance writer*

ATEEZ, "Cyberpunk"

It was a brutal summer, in which the northern hemisphere suffered killer heat waves, and WWII trended on Twitter with worrying frequency. ATEEZ's July release, *The World EP1: Movement*, offered atmospheric escapism, even if it was to their own Metropolis-inspired dystopia. As its dark sci-fi heart, "Cyberpunk" boldly marries lyrical bleakness to grandiose, thumping electropop that hisses and shudders as it gathers pace, surprisingly agile and even sinuous in places but completely unstoppable. Cinematically observational, theirs is a city that wants to annihilate them: *I am crushed by the silence falling like a veil*, sings Seonghwa. As rapper Mingi muses, *Existence itself is doubtful, life has lost its meaning*. Yet for every jagged, jaded moment, there's a sliver of fight left inside — each tumbling, sneering chorus intercepted by Jongho's soaring plea of *I wanna feel alive, don't wanna stay in the dark*. Off a tumultuous, belting bridge, his is the final ricocheting voice you hear, a precarious but tenacious affirmation that even when we're brought to our knees, hope finds a way to spring eternal. —*Taylor Glasby, writer*

Red Velvet, "Feel My Rhythm"

K-pop plus classical music is a top-tier combination, and Red Velvet proved it in 2022. Released in March as the title track of *The ReVe Festival 2022 - Feel My Rhythm*, “Feel My Rhythm” is the first of several classical-meets-pop crossovers by the band, blending samples from Bach’s “Air on the G String” with the quintet’s signature vocals that we all know and love. The song’s intense trap beat contrasts against elegant strings and results in a gorgeous mix of old and new, perfect for fans of either genre to vibe out and dance to Red Velvet’s rhythm. —*Yati Sanghvi*, social media editor at the *Wall Street Journal*

SEVENTEEN, "Don Quixote"

From Shinee's "Sherlock" to BTS's "Blood, Sweat & Tears," a subversive, page-turning current runs through K-pop's canon: pure bops punctuated by classic lit-minded lyricism. Tossing aside the master detective and *bildungsroman* references, SEVENTEEN's "Don Quixote" interprets the first-ever modern novel and makes it their own. A propulsive, clap pulsing banger, this *Face The Sun* B-side distills the "it ain't real [...] it's real" burning vibes of our gaslighting, codifying times, and the band's impractical idealist ethos. "We're a little similar to Don Quixote," confesses Woozi, SEVENTEEN's vocal leader and one of the song's co-writers, to **NYLON**. "Some people might point fingers or criticize us and say, 'That's not the right way, that's not the right answer,' but I just hope people think, 'This is just who they are.'" —*Rea McNamara, writer, curator, and baddie mom*

NCT Dream, "To My First"

While many fear the passage of time and the loss of doe-eyed innocence, NCT Dream show us the beauty of maturation through their vocal performance of “To My First.” The group croons wisdom learned through heartbreak over smooth guitar quartets floating over an R&B melody; “To My First” is juxtaposed against the hopeless and naively romantic lead single off of their first EP released five years ago, “My First and My Last.” Through seamless transitions as each member chimes in on the song of a love lost in youth, NCT Dream makes it easy for any listener to reflect as they belt along — and blink back a tear or two. —*Rianne Akindede, music and culture writer*

TWICE, “Talk That Talk”

2022 has proven to be something of a watershed year for TWICE despite being seven years into their career together. From renewing their contracts with JYP Entertainment to gradually branching out into solo endeavors, it seems as though they are only just getting started. The subsequent release of “Talk That Talk” further drove that sentiment home by bringing the rich synth sounds they’ve popularized to even loftier heights. It’s charismatic, bold, and filled with an unmistakably funky cadence that screams TWICE. It’s par for the course for a group with a discography as extensive and diverse as theirs. Long gone are the naïve, idealistic girls behind “Cheer Up” and “Knock Knock. A slicker, more emboldened TWICE has emerged from the chrysalis reborn. —*Carmen Chin*,
freelance K-pop writer

B.I, "BTBT"

On his album *Love or Loved Pt.1*, B.I dives into the skin-tingling thrill of young love... and "BTBT" is its crowning jewel. The futuristic, cyberpunk setting of the video — where B.I and his friends speed through the skyline in flying cars — is elevated by a sensual, latin-inspired progression and punctuated by exciting horns. B.I invites us into his world through relaxed, yet confident rapping; he takes your hand and zooms ahead at warp speed. All the while, butterflies swirl in your stomach and you hang on for dear life, but you wouldn't trade this ride for anything else in the world. If there's one K-pop song in 2022 that you shouldn't miss, it's this one. —*Tanu I. Raj, writer*

Seulgi, "28 Reasons"

Mischievous. Bold. Elegant. Red Velvet's Seulgi reminded fans of her prowess with her solo debut track "28 Reasons" while solidifying her reputation as a K-pop ace. An eerie bass and a hypnotizing melody accompany the song's emphasis on the duality of human nature, shifting between good and evil. Seulgi's saccharine vocals deliver lyrics that express a tangible anxiety that comes from wanting something that will hurt in the end. It's a game we've all been a part of. Still there's a quiet innocence that extends to the singer's overarching persona as a member of Red Velvet — calculating, coy, yet bright. Overall, "28 Reasons" is a mind-bending progression of intricate strings, synths, and steady bass accompanied by an earworm whistle. With visuals as captivating as the song, "28 Reasons" is a testament to Seulgi's promising solo career. —*Nnehkai Agbor, freelance writer*

IVE, "After Like"

IVE closed out the summer with "After Like," the title single from their third album of the same name. The song's sweet-yet-flirty message and disco-themed orchestration captured the hearts of fans everywhere: "You and I...It's more than like...L and an O and..." The hook, which samples Gloria Gaynor's hit "I Will Survive," was particularly inspiring to internet users, especially TikToker @evadentz, who used the song in a meme of *Real Housewives* star Lisa Rinna stylised as an M&M from a 2008 ad campaign. Thus was born the viral pairing of IVE and Lisa Rinna, and the immortalisation of "After Like" as one of the catchiest tunes of the year. —*Awuor Onguru, freelance writer*

GOT the Beat, "Step Back"

What do you get when you combine powerhouse vocals, experimental sounds, and a decades-long innovation streak? SM Entertainment's project group GOT the Beat, which brings together seven idols from all four generations of K-pop — BoA, Taeyeon and Hyoyeon from Girls' Generation, Seulgi and Wendy from Red Velvet, and Karina and Winter from aespa. It's a surreal delight watching the newer stars hold their own alongside industry legends, and the song's slew of minor chords and haunting, driving beat make it one of the more interesting tracks from 2022. Sure, the lyrics fall short, but as D.W. from *Arthur* once said, "That sign can't stop me because I can't read." —

Sophie Guimaraes, writer and editor

BTS, “For Youth”

There’s no arguing that 2022 came with a hefty serving of change for BTS and ARMY, but with it — as always — came reassurance in the form of music. “For Youth” is a waltzing serenade, saluting the group’s first decade-long chapter as they move on to the next. An unmatched and unrepeatable legacy concentrated into four minutes and 24 seconds of warmth and tenderness, its lyrics pay tribute to the remarkable connection BTS have built, both between the members themselves and with the people who love them. We may still be learning what **Bangtan’s Chapter Two** will bring, but “For Youth” promises one thing: this mutual devotion, at least, will stay the same. —*Ellie Bate, entertainment and culture writer*

Sunmi, "Heart Burn"

To say that Sunmi turned the heat up this summer would be a *sore* understatement. Dreamy and sensual, the soloist beautifully embodies the hazy passion of a midsummer romance in “Heart Burn,” each word escaping her lips in gentle sighs and gasps. Alluring melodies ache with yearning over a soft guitar groove, unveiling a tender new side to Sunmi’s trademark sultriness. And when she pleads to “*take me higher, one more time / before the burning night in the sleeping city cools,*” you’ll find yourself flushed, as if from a heated kiss on a blistering summer afternoon. —*Gladys Yeo, freelance writer*

ONEW, "In the Whale"

You ever hear a song that instantly scratches that wonderfully nostalgic itch in your brain? A song that's technically new but feels like you've had it in your back pocket, just waiting to be pulled out on a rainy day? That's how SHINee's Onew makes "In the whale" feel as he closes out his sophomore album *DICE* with this cozy midtempo number. Through the '80s-inspired new wave synths, Onew does everything in his power to make the listener feel safe and travel back to a place where time is irrelevant — merely a construct to keep us from living in the moment and embracing our journey. —*Chyenne Tatum, culture writer*

Suho, "Hurdle"

How would you define Suho? The upstanding, chiseled leader of EXO. Lover of Dad jokes and ballads. Secret goofball and bonafide gentleman. We first witnessed a deviation through EXO's 2019 banger "Obsession" when Suho emerged as his "X-EXO" alter-ego (the group's baddie counterparts). Glitter, sexy smirk, red hair waxed into horns, with a cropped bolero revealing ripped abs, it was a seismic shift felt across K-pop. Three years later, after returning from his mandatory military enlistment, he's given us something to howl at again. *Grey Suit*, his sophomore EP released in April, was a minxy, sultry, multigenre album, and off it, the anthemic "Hurdle" was a revelation. An unexpected swerve from Suho, who ricocheted between a tight falsetto and honeyed baritone effortlessly over distorted guitars, the song was arguably his take on '90s Brit-pop — think Pulp or Suede, but brighter, more funkadelic, and less slurry. It was an ambitious foray that paid off, leaving us echoing Suho's opening lines, "Oh, what's your secret formula?" —*Ambika Muttoo, editor-in-chief, Femina*

(G)I-DLE, "Tomboy"

Dotting the I and crossing out the G, (G)I-DLE make K-pop go punk with the angsty and rowdy "Tomboy." Heavy guitars rip out power chords that cue the listener into their grievances against the world, as it wouldn't be a true punk influence without a message and a little bit of anger. Boldly stating "it's neither man nor woman, just me, I-DLE," the girls show the power of just being yourself in the face of prejudice and societal expectations. Then, on the flip side of the punk is a playful and energetic underbelly, evident in Soyeon's controversial yet boisterous rap. I don't think she lied when she said that she would rather film a TikTok than experience misogyny and discrimination. A galvanizing mix of fun and resolve on top of a social message, "Tomboy" just makes sense as the title track for (G)I-DLE's first full album. —*Anton Rohr, freelance writer*

NCT 127, "Designer"

NCT 127 as a unit span multiple styles, with some songs prioritizing the trigger-fast talents of its rappers and others sinking into the thick, saucy vocals of its singers. "Designer" is like Goldilocks landing on the perfect meal, with just the right amount of the two, neatly nestled in the middle of their 4th album, *2 Baddies*. From the first few bars you're immediately struck with an overriding question of how a song this good didn't exist already. The track is a constant bait-and-switch, cutting between rattling hip-hop beats and cheerful pop production, and speeding up before slowing down like an aural game of cat and mouse. Rappers Mark and Taeyong contributed to the song's lyrics, which compare their lover to a perfectly tailored designer fit, hugging them in all the right places. NCT 127 are one of the most well-rounded groups in K-pop, and they're never better than in songs where each of the 9 member's talents come together piece by piece like a well-made suit. —*Lucy Ford, culture writer*

Taeyeon, "INVU"

Sometimes, the worst part of being dumped is not seeing your hopes and dreams vanish into thin air. It's witnessing the other person thrive while you are still ugly crying on the bathroom floor. If that specific wave of envy has ever hit you, don't fret — Taeyon's "INVU" will hold you, feed you, and make you feel whole again. In all its Olympian poise, this chill, synth-laced single honors the feelings we try so hard to deny, bundling them in a sacred, lush atmosphere. Confident that acceptance is the first step to redemption, Taeyeon pours universal woes through her pristine voice, and makes a beautiful, yet gut-wrenching plea: "So when you leave / Please make it easy / Cause I-N-V-U." Time may heal it all, but knowing we're not alone is what ultimately allows us to move on. —*Tássia Assis, freelance writer*

RM, "Change pt. 2"

When you grow tired of heartache, you get angry. In "Change pt.2," anger compresses beneath resentment and shape-shifts into jagged dissonance, a black screen glitching with unwanted memory. Everything changes, RM says. Yet you keep repeating the same mistakes, keep opening your heart to others' indifference. RM's anger suddenly tumbles into sparse piano notes, like the uneven steps of someone who's lost their way. By the end, he finds his footing. "You can't love someone like I do," he realizes. In the haphazard, ever-changing noise of hurt, perhaps love is the clearest sound. —*Victoria Huynh, writer*

GOT7, "NANANA"

All men do is lie — except GOT7. When the group **chose not to renew their contracts with JYP Entertainment** in 2021, they left with a promise to one day come back as seven. And after a bit over a year of focusing on individual projects, GOT7 beat all odds by releasing their self-titled EP with the single “NANANA.” The song was not only a promise kept to fans but a celebration of the sound that made people fall in love with them. “NANANA” is a vibe, a state of mind embellished with R&B flourishes and enhanced by their fun essence. It proved that “GOT7 forever” is not just lip service, it’s a commitment. — *Alexis Hodoyán-Gastélum, music editor at Remezcla*

Stray Kids, "Maniac"

"MANIAC," the chart-topping lead single from Stray Kids 6 th EP *ODDINARY*, was a refreshing addition to the K-pop releases of 2022. Sonically, this trap-infused earworm binds the listener with its funky energy, catchy melody, and Felix's gorgeous repetition of "maniac" in the chorus. The lyrics ask us to embrace what makes us "odd," for these unique aspects of ourselves, not the conformity dictated by societal pressure, are what is truly ordinary. The accompanying MV and choreography (Changbin's poppin', anybody?) bring the lyrics to life in the most colorful, delicious way. "MANIAC" is a celebration of K-pop at its best — a tantalizingly visual marriage of music, dance and style that is equal parts brilliant, wacky and so addictive it shouldn't be played anywhere near exam-time. Add to it the authenticity and sweet rawness that is the multi-hyphenate octet's brand and it will make even the most discerning of music listeners stay. —*Stacy Nam, producer and digital host*

tripleS AAA, "Generation"

Jaden Jeong's done it again! The brains behind LOONA's visionary peak is back with a new girl group project called tripleS under his label MODHAUS and they're already making waves. The group's first subunit, Acid Angel from Asia (AAA), stormed TikTok with their catchy hit "Generation," making the sparkling Y2K vibes of NewJeans their own. Then, um, they disbanded. Apparently, each tripleS subunit must sell 100K albums to become permanent. Did I mention that tripleS as a whole is supposed to be a 24-member group? Oh, for the love of AKB! If they succeed, 2023 will be very interesting. —

Sarah Raughley, author of [The Bones of Ruin](#) and [The Effigies Series](#)

LOONA, "Flip That"

One of this year's best songs has to be the one that ended up at the top of my Spotify Wrapped — LOONA's "Flip That," the leading single out of their June EP of the same name. There's something incredibly captivating about this summer bop and its ear-worm chorus; the entire song drips in magical realism, like a door leading into a world of unexpected wonders. It was somewhat a departure from the comebacks that **LOONA** has gotten us used to in recent years, but a very welcome one that has left me wanting more. —*Benedetta Geddo, entertainment writer*

BLACKPINK, “Shut Down”

An effective ode to their haters, BLACKPINK’s “Shut Down” is a musical masterpiece. Kicking off strong with a classical music sample of “La Campanella,” the song captivates listeners with violin backed by BLACKPINK’s signature bass and hip-hop sound. Throughout the song, BLACKPINK takes jabs at their doubters with a charming wink and pointed lyrics like “praying for my downfall, many have tried.” The world’s biggest girl group solidified their status with “Shut Down” and reiterated that everyone, and we mean everyone, tunes in for BLACKPINK. They’re only going up. —*Maddy Myer, entertainment writer*

KEY, "Gasoline"

Few idols are as bold and unabashed as SHINee's KEY, and the lead single from his second solo album of the same name proves it. "A-list, the latest, made it, I'm ready," he chants in the refrain... as if we had any doubt of his reign as one of K-pop's most confident and competent second-gen stars. ("Wind me up just to cut me down / It's just more fuel for me," he teases, seemingly ready to pounce upon anyone doubting his dominance.) Braggadocious lyrics aside, you can't help but stay fired up from the beat — led by heavy drums and complemented by a marching band-esque arrangement — from start to finish. Dauntless, unapologetic, and *almost* too hot to handle, "Gasoline" is a dynamic banger that represents SHINee's sassiest member in all his blazing glory. —

Michele Ross, freelance writer

J-Hope, "Equal Sign"

J-Hope is an artist and storyteller with an agenda. Whether by being the first member of BTS to release an official solo album — in the shape of the sonically-daring *Jack In the Box* — or being the first K-pop solo artist to headline and subsequently **sell out a major American music festival at Lollapalooza**, J-Hope isn't afraid of challenging people's long-held perceptions of him. But where his image and musicality have evolved, his desire to spread love, give comfort, and inspire millions remains the same; nowhere is this more evident than in his standout track, and my K-pop anthem of 2022, "Equal Sign." In this stunning ballad, he encourages his fans to celebrate their differences and fight against hate and inequality. As one of the members who's endured some of the most vitriolic hate early on in his career, J-Hope has only emerged stronger and more keen to do what he does best: expand hope to his fans, many of whom are of different races, genders, sexualities, classes, nationalities, and abilities. He rejects apathy and embraces sincerity, urging us to all have faith that regardless of the failing systems and institutions around us, we can trust that "equality" can be found in "you and me." —*Teresa Tran, writer and filmmaker*

Max Changmin, "Fever"

It was December 31st, 2021, and as all the party people do, I was parked firmly on my couch live-streaming the SMTOWN New Year's Eve concert. Somewhere among the various group stages and Lee Soo Man's **Kwangya conductor cameos**, as midnight struck and 2022 arrived, I was served the song that would remain a favorite for the entire year to come. MAX aka Changmin of TVXQ sashayed down the steps of a dimly lit stage, opened his mouth, and proceeded to blow my mind for four minutes straight. "Fever," the first sneak peek off his equally impressive January album *Devil*, is K-pop meets Panic! At The Disco meets *The Greatest Showman* — sounds cursed, but absolutely slaps. "Auld Lang Syne" is shaking. —*Kate Halliwell, The Ringer*

ITZY, “What I Want”

ITZY’s “What I Want” leaves no room for hesitation. It takes barely a second once the song begins for Yeji to launch into the unabashedly declarative refrain: “I know what I want.” This proclamation combined with Ryujin’s promise of achieving that goal — “gonna get, get what I want,” she raps immediately after — makes the track an invigorating pep talk to self. While ITZY had another prolific year, their B-sides in 2022 reigned supreme. Among them, “What I Want” is a standout for its funky synths reminiscent of video game beeps and an exuberant prechorus melody that’s as addictive as the spunky chorus rap. —*Kat Moon, news and shows writer at TV Guide*

Mark Lee, "Child"

This year saw the release of **Mark Lee**'s first solo track, a moody self-composed and written song that was candid and raw. "Child" explores a side of Mark that fans don't often get to see, giving us an introspective dive into the way the responsibility that's come along with his life as an idol has impacted him. Switching between English and Korean throughout the tune, Mark flexes his writing muscles while also showcasing his vocal abilities and trademark style of rap. Deep synth sounds paired with electric guitar keep the song sounding a bit melancholy and gloomy throughout, taking us into the mind of a young artist working hard while still coming into himself, discovering who he is and how he fits into the world around him. While Mark Lee might still be working on discovering the secret to success, it's clear he doesn't let the chatter get to him, as he leaves us with words to live by: "Y'all talk too much." —*Vandana Pawa, writer*

SEVENTEEN, "Shadow"

There's a reason this SEVENTEEN standout touched so many fans (and made a permanent home in my trash-filled brain). For a while, it often felt like the group were made to choose between the brighter and darker versions of themselves — "Pretty U" or "Getting Closer"? But in "Shadow," the 13 members contend that they can do both, because "even my darkness will shine brightly." What else shines in this certified banger? The brilliant use of the rough textures of the hip-hop teams' vocals; the way the galloping 2-step beat cradles vulnerable lyrics. It's SEVENTEEN at their best — a group in unrelenting pursuit of radiance and warmth for all who listen. —*Natalie Morin, nonfiction editor at Netflix Tudum*

Billie, "GingaMingaYo (the strange world)"

2022 was dominated by monster rookie girl groups from large companies, but there was still room for an organic viral hit. The success of Billie's first comeback "GingaMingaYo" was fueled by a fancam that showed a masterclass of facial expressions, as main dancer Tsuki expressed the song's message of 긴가민가, or uncertainty, by going from playful to serious to fierce in a split second. Beyond the viral fancam, the infectious, bass house-infused single is a pure bop that shows off the strengths of the seven-member group, while sucking in new listeners who become curious about their stellar discography. —

Quinci LeGardye, freelance culture writer

ONEUS, "Same Scent"

Yearning is an intricate feeling to untangle. It burns, but beneath it lies a sour sweetness that offers some relief. On “Same Scent,” ONEUS explore the vulnerability of missing a lover but conclude that, ultimately, there’s no other option than to move forward, and better days will come. At the apex, seductive guitar strings clear the way for the vocal rawness of members Seoho and Keonhee — two of the best singers in the fourth generation of K-pop — that is grounded with Xion’s crystalline delivery of “*I can’t get you off my mind my, my, my, my mind / Off my mind, my, my, my mind.*” Given that ONEUS have always had a flair for luring the audience into their orb, this time, the weapon of choice is an irresistible record that showcases the group’s affinity for continuous (and untouchable) growth. —*Ivana E. Morales, freelance culture journalist*

Nayeon, "Pop"

All eyes were on the glamorous princess Im Nayeon in 2022 as her dulcet vocals took the world by storm, leading us to sing along to "POP!" at every waking moment. As the first member of TWICE to release a solo, Nayeon revealed her effortless gusto and exquisite musical colors at center stage. Her sugary anthem explored the flirtatious and accrescent sentiments of romance using onomatopoeia to portray popping a lover's heart like a bubble. Creating a refreshing and effervescent ambience at the push of a button, "POP!" is a testament to Nayeon's vocal prowess and caliber, with no limit to her artistry. —*Sofia E. Gomez, freelance journalist*

Moon Byul, "LUNATIC"

It is only MAMAMOO's Moon Byul, a rapper-singer with an instinctual, affable theatricality, who could turn a song about a plunging relationship into giddy, prismatic self-love. She tumbles into a mid-song rap break to compare her frenzied mania to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and follows it up with a chorus of babbling "blah blah blah"s. There's equal confidence in both passages because, really, "LUNATIC" is a song about self — the one she, her mother, and her lover know very well. There's no reason to hide, and so she sings the titular line with the largest grin, its accompanying funk-lite house groove bouncing along as an avoidant stopgap for handling romantic difficulties. She owns up to emotional vacillations, to her vertiginous state — she takes self-awareness as consolation for her misery. —*Joshua Minsoo Kim, Editor-in-Chief of Tone Glow*

SNSD, "Forever 1"

"Forever 1" is a love letter from the OG queens of K-pop to their dedicated fans, assuring them they will be together for a long time. The song is produced by Kenzie, who also produced the group's iconic debut single "Into The New World," 15 years ago; if you listen carefully, there are traces of that song's opening notes in the beginning of "Forever 1" as well. Since the group's 2017 hiatus, the members have branched out into extremely successful solo careers, which makes the anniversary comeback even more meaningful and intentional, considering the members' packed schedules. For SONEs, the moment is bittersweet. The last SNSD hiatus was five years long, and it is undetermined when the members will make music together again. If "Forever 1" is any indication, however, the next comeback would be worth the wait. —*Hannah Abraham, freelance writer*

J-Hope, "Stop (There Are No Bad People in the World)"

On his highly anticipated solo debut album *Jack in The Box*, J-Hope gives us a glimpse of the world through his point of view. After opening up the project with some self reflection, he turns to society with track 4, "STOP (There are No Bad People in the World)." In this old school hip-hop tune, J-Hope tackles the mental tug-of-war of judging people based on their actions alone vs. considering educational and environmental struggles that made them that way. He stresses that people are not one dimensional; character isn't strictly black or white, it's a bottomless mixture of ambiguous colors. Is a person inherently bad, or are they just a victim of their circumstances? Or...both? J-Hope's uncertainty is reflected in the dark melody and grimy instrumental of the track. He's trying to convince himself because he, too, has fallen victim to what he is preaching against. But in true J-Hope fashion, he chooses optimism. He says it is up to us to take those small steps of understanding, and one day society will change for the better because there are no bad people in the world. "Please be right," he says to himself, full of hope. —*Glow Ngwe, freelance writer*

SEVENTEEN, "Cheers"

This song captures the energy of SEVENTEEN perfectly — it's loud, unapologetic, and triumphant. The group sends the leaders of their three teams forward to represent them with this celebratory track: S. Coups charms with his seductive whispers, Woozi surprises with his sultry vocals, and Hoshi allures with his sassy hip moves. "Cheers" incorporates some fun and bubbly elements to create a memorable tune: It starts with a whimsical flute hook and begins to blend in the genres of trap and synth pop with hip-hop style lyric delivery creating an earworm that digs itself deep. It's a sound the group hasn't tried before, but every time these masters of reinvention experiment with new sounds, they will likely excel. The song has perfect live performance energy, but we'll never forget when it was famously omitted from the *Be The Sun* tour setlist when the group brought the shows over to North America from Japan, a sin which SEVENTEEN will have to answer to all the scornful fans for. —*Anjana Pawa, culture writer*

Wonstein, "Your Existence"

There are times to stand resolute — and times to get moving. A glittering jewel in the soundtrack of the hit youth drama *Twenty-Five Twenty-One*, this song serves as a reminder that love propels us forward. Wonstein himself has risen to the heights of Korea's R&B/hip-hop scene from humble beginnings. He's therefore the perfect choice to soar over key moments in our protagonist's life, elevating her buoyant determination and heart-fluttering anticipation to something worth idealizing. When life knocks you down, borrow their courage. Keep moving forward to your dreams. —*Jiye Kim, culture writer*

Super Junior, "Don't Wait"

"Don't Wait," from Super Junior's 11th album *The Road: Keep on Going*, is a bright, energetic number demonstrating the K-pop legends' ability to sound fresh even in the 17th year of their career. While the upbeat rhythm, bass hook, and signature SuJu vocals will have you tapping your toes and singing along in no time, perhaps the greatest charm of "Don't Wait" is its retro **music video**. With styling inspired by mods and rockers, the members get into a dance-off as they vie for the affections of a mysterious figure in a yellow dress. The reveal at the end had fans (well, this fan, at least) squealing with delight — and it's clear the guys **had a lot of fun filming it**, too. —*Claire H. Evans, freelance writer*

aespa, "Life's Too Short"

In a virtual world that exposes your real emotions, aespa recognize that the next level comes with as much praise as criticism. Rather than let the hate define or cripple them, the girls deliver savage lyrics as a shield, a refrain, a mantra: "I'm doing me regardless." They resist making the song as punchy as the lyrics. Instead of a bitter pill to swallow, aespa feed trolls spicy insults, washed down with honey harmonies, R&B tones, and a nostalgic haze over the visuals. As we sing along, they transfer a defiant celebration drowning the noise — I control my happiness. —*Yetti, Youtuber at Seoul Connection*

P1Harmony, "Do It Like This"

It's hard to debut in the middle of the pandemic, but P1Harmony has managed to solidify themselves as the next big thing. "Do it Like This" is an energetic party anthem that will definitely make you bob your head along with its catchy beats and synth hooks. I saw P1Harmony perform this track at a museum in Toronto back in September, when leader Keeho brought the members back to his hometown for a show. The venue was unique, and it was odd to see a K-pop band perform next to a giant dinosaur skeleton. But the group lit up the stage with intense choreography and stage presence. "Do It Like This" may not be the most revelatory K-pop song, but it's FUN. The atmosphere was infectious watching them perform it, and made me an instant Plece. —*Samantha Lui, culture and entertainment writer*

Chang Kiha, "Envy None"

Earlier this year Chang Kiha, the former leader of the legendary K-indie band **Kiha & The Faces**, took South Korea's music scene by storm with the release of his first solo EP *Levitation*. The album's lead track "Envy None," with its quirky yet strangely addictive tune and incisive, relatable lyrics, became an instant hit among Korean millennials and Gen Zers, who **even turned it into a meme song**. In his trademark spoken word-style of rapping, Chang asserts that the way to one-up everyone else in a bragging contest is to, well, brag about not feeling jealous. "If you have something you want to brag about, brag as much as you want / I'm fine with that / **Because I'm not jealous / I'm not jealous at all,**" **Chang raps**, later adding, "There's someone in the world who doesn't know what envy is / Do you know who that is? It's me." "Envy None" exemplifies Chang's subtle creativity, masterful wordplay and distinctive flow that have endeared him to many Koreans. Not to mention, the song's trippy, hypnotic music video is performance art at its finest. — *Regina Kim, freelance entertainment writer*

J-Hope, "More"

Somewhere in the tangled space between '90s hip-hop and grunge rock lives "MORE," a gloriously uncommercial headbanger about the complexities of creative growth under capitalism. That J-Hope chose it not only as the opening salvo to album *Jack in the Box*, but to BTS' second chapter, speaks to his — and the other members' — commitment to artistic expression, no matter where it leads. Characterized by a rock guitar chorus and raw, raspy vocals that build to bellows, "MORE" is both a bullish promise of what's ahead and an honest proclamation that hope can come in many forms, not all of them sunny. Lollapalooza never stood a chance. —*Kayti Burt, pop culture journalist*

Treasure, "Darari"

An entrancing melody brings you into the world of TREASURE — “Da-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ri, The music is looking at you, baby.” The listener becomes the muse in “DARARI” as the members confess to their crush through lyrics handcrafted by (now former) member **Yedam**. After a fan choreographed infectious moves on TikTok, the song blew up exponentially. “DARARI” became one of the biggest trends of the year, with 3.7 million videos using one reupload of the track. The group then adapted the fan’s choreography to the 12-member lot, even creating a special rock version for live performances. Stealing the hearts of the next generation of K-Pop stans seems to have come easy to TREASURE. —*Lily Dabbs, writer*

Seulgi, “Dead Man Runnin’”

With *28 Reasons*, Red Velvet’s lead vocalist introduced us to a new sound: Seulthern Gothic. Watching the album’s cinematic trailer back, you can almost hear the staccato strings that open “Dead Man Runnin’” as an anxious, determined Seulgi walks away from a car she’s set fire to. Those strings, combined with a low humming bassline and a vocal performance that beautifully webs between angered restraint and raw emotion make “Dead Man Runnin’” one of K-pop’s most unique tracks of the year. Seulgi penned the song’s Korean lyrics herself, telling the story of a woman out for revenge that mirrors classic country songs. “Even if you attempt to run free, that’s all it is / It’s worth it for the hopeless look on your face / Funny, isn’t it?” —*Hannah Zwick, history and culture writer*

Cravity, “Party Rock”

“Party Rock,” co-written by Swedish producer Ollipop, has been on my K-pop running playlist since its release in September, and it’s the perfect kick in the butt to get up from the couch. The song is fun and energetic, with a sprinter hook that takes interval training up a notch. The sound is lighthearted but just as infectious as previous songs from the band; it’s a highly danceable tune that might send the guys up to next level K-pop stardom. “Party Rock” even snagged the group their first music show win on SBS. —

Camilla Fuhr, freelance journalist and editor at [Ktownfeatures](#)

NCT 127, "Time Lapse"

Most K-pop fans know: Any song opening with a muffled "incomiiiiing!" will sound unlike anything they've heard before. Although the exclamation is Dem Jointz's signature, it's almost synonymous with his frequent collaborator, NCT 127; the producer left his mark on several NCT tracks, including "Cherry Bomb" and "Sticker." While the latter met mixed reception, "Time Lapse" is a redemption. Its construction is genius, from the robotic error noises following the "can we fix it?" chorus to the impenetrable tempo. The song even **sparked several memes** solidifying its status as the perfect breakup anthem — BRB, blasting this outside my ex's window. —*Lucia Ruan, freelance journalist*

VIVIZ, "Bop Bop!"

Nine months after girl group GFRIEND's disbandment was revealed, BPM Entertainment released an exciting announcement that three of the former members, Eunha, SinB, and Umji, would be participating in their new girl group, VIVIZ. Their highly-anticipated debut did not disappoint either. "Bop! Bop!" strikes listeners with a funky disco melody that is both catchy and refreshing. The lyrics encourage listeners to "feel the music" and "bop" to the rhythm of your feet. The song awarded VIVIZ two music show wins, allowing the girls to carry on GFRIEND's legacy, while also making a new, fresh, name for themselves. —*Alyssa Suarez, freelance reporter*

NCT Dream, "Glitch Mode"

We all know that NCT Dream broke countless records with their first full length album, *Hot Sauce*. Following that success, it was hard to ensure that these boys would be able to top their first album back together again as seven members, since Mark “graduated” out of NCT Dream. More than a year later, the boys were able to prove with their second full album that they weren’t going anywhere, selling a combined total of over 3.61 million copies between *Glitch Mode* and the repackage *Beatbox*. Throughout 2021, title track “Glitch Mode” has continued to chart, while staying unique and fresh with their viral choreography and amazing vocals. The song highlights all of the member’s individual vocal colors and delivers a catchy electronic song that is pretty much impossible to get out of your head. —*Serena Khaheera, entertainment correspondent*

STAYC, "RUN2U"

There's a lot of iconic songs about running, and 2022 seemed like a renaissance for songs with running imagery. Kate Bush's iconic "Running Up That Hill" resurfaced, and STACY's follow-up to their hit "Stereotype," "Run2U," is another bright, citrus-sweet song about kinetic movement. With an underlying pulsing instrumental, "Run2U" is entirely sincere about the serious business of love. "So I run to you," exclaims the chorus. In a perfect moment, right after "I run to you," is sung, the song leaves space for the instrumental to respond to the ardent line. A call-and-response of sorts; A promise that all fervent expressions of love, desire will receive an echo, a phantom kiss back. What's at the end of running? Hopefully, you and me. — *Jenny Zheng, Culture and Video Games Writer*

Epik High, "Prequel"

You can hear an echo of urgency running beneath the heartbeat of "Prequel," from **Epik High**. Tablo and Mithra Jin trade bars as Tukutz scratches freestyle over a clean, crisp beat. The trio tumble back through two decades together in a triumphant testament to their collective soul and synergy. They reignite faded memories, chasing the flame of ambition that fuelled Epik High's flight. "Prequel" is a promise the band make to themselves and their listeners, to the mic and the turntable. Lyrical couplets and candid snapshots paint the past in vivid color, mapping a path for fans old and new to follow into the future. —*Hannah Weiss, music and culture writer*

J-Hope, "Future"

Everyone questions what the future holds for them, and BTS's rapper-songwriter-producer j-hope ponders the same on his gleaming track "Future." On his debut album *Jack In The Box*, which dropped in July 2022, the musician tells the tale of the passion and agony of an artist. Performed for the first time at Lollapalooza 2022, the hip-hop track with choir music encapsulates the mixed emotions of uncertainty and fear while courage, faith, and hope keep him going. On "Hope World," released in 2018, an optimistic J-Hope was ready to take on the world. On "Future," J-Hope, who has been a ray of hope and positivity to millions of fans around the world, turns introspective. Hope is the strength he draws from the people who listen to his music, the courage they provide him with and the faith they have in him as he croons, per translation from Doolset Bangtan, "*When I said I do / Courage and faith / The rhythm of positivity / Always, I need it too / When I said I do / Walking the future, my steps of hope.*" As someone who lost a parent a month ago, the song remains a huge part of my healing as I try to take one day at a time; it gives me strength to hope. And just like that, the "rhythm of positivity" helps J-Hope to go with the flow in the face of adversity. —*Monica Yadav, assistant editor at Bollywood Hungama*

Balming Tiger feat. RM, "Sexy Nukim"

There's something about "Sexy Nukim" that captures the mood of the age. It's sexy, yes, but also deeply weird, with a tongue-in-cheek sense of humor, especially when combined with the dark, absurdist, pop culture reference-filled music video. This unique mix prevents it from being cringe or off-putting, as sexual songs can often veer, with the Balming Tiger members — plus BTS leader RM, of course — each bringing their own flavor to the track. Also, it would be remiss of me to leave out the fact that **RM performing with Balming Tiger** at the *WKorea* "Love Your W" event permanently changed my brain chemistry. —*Jenna Guillaume, entertainment journalist and YA author*

Red Velvet, "Birthday"

As the second act following "Feel My Rhythm," "Birthday" turns Red Velvet upside down, showing the group's artistic duality. Forget about Bach, ballet, and classic European paintings. "Birthday" features a sample of the jazzy "Rhapsody in Blue" by George Gershwin, a synth-heavy chorus, and a frenetic dance break. The music video follows them as they mischievously sneak into a party. It's full of bright colors, funny creatures and an absurd sense of humor — Wendy winning rock, paper, scissors with Edward Scissorhands is a highlight. They look, and sound, like they are having a blast, and we are ready to join them. —*Juana Giaimo, freelance writer*

WJSN Chocome, "Super Yuppies!"

Welcome back, campy K-pop — I, for one, have missed you. All hail our reigning pantheon of **sushi queens** and **Power Ranger overlords**, of course, but, *finally*, a new challenger has appeared: On nu-disco "Super Yuppies!," sub-unit WJSN Chocome are the heroes we need but don't deserve. The music video for their sophomore offering is part magical girl anime, part cheesy action flick, and part...Pepsi commercial? It's been a minute since I've laughed this hard listening to — and watching — a song. We live in self-serious times, to which **absurdity** can be a singular antidote. Count on K-pop to save the day. —*Abby Webster, writer*

Chung Ha, "Sparkling"

Bow down and apply your eye glitter. Mother Chung Ha's "Sparkling" track further proves glittering eyeshadow, a bursting synth line, and impeccable choreography are the perfect recipe for one of the year's most shimmering productions. Forget sweating, sobbing, or sleeping — for three minutes and 10 seconds, forgo feeling plebeian emotions. When Chung Ha says you need to sparkle, you say when. If you're going to exist in Chung Ha's orbit, you're commanded to find the immaculate twinkle within: "I'll be your sparkle," she asserts bewitchingly, culminating in transcendent sound waves seeping the brain and sparking the need to live your boldest, bad b*tch lives. The song is not only a celebratory comeback to the industry but a revelation that we are but mere mortals trying to learn from a transcendent being like Queen Kim Chung Ha. —*Kelly Nguyen, freelance journalist*

(G)I-DLE, "Nxde"

K-pop girl group (G)I-DLE continue to establish themselves as a creative force to be reckoned with on "Nxde," offering up an empowering commentary on the male gaze wrapped up in a sultry blend of burlesque and Old Hollywood. Breaking down the sexualisation of women and regressive notions of beauty, "Nxde," is a clapback of epic proportions led by powerful lyricism and a seamless blend of infectious sonics and eye-catching aesthetics. Consisting of Soyeon, Yuqi, Minnie, Shuhua, and Miyeon, this quintet has established themselves as an emblem of multiculturalism with their amalgamation of Chinese, Thai, and Korean culture, and continue to deliver unique artistry led by poignant messages and artistic concepts. —*Malvika Padin, freelance journalist*

Jaehyun, "Forever Only"

25-year-old Jaehyun of NCT is no stranger to solo work; his amazing cover of Lauv's "I Like Me Better" went viral in 2019, and his 2017 SM Station track "Try Again" also showcased his angelic vocals. With the launch of NCT Lab, Jaehyun gave his music an even more personal touch. Releasing "Forever Only" in August, accompanied by a simple yet cozy music video, he leveled up from previous releases. The introspective pop-R&B song suits the star well. It's easy listening, melodic, and soundtracks a warm winter night just as well as a summer outside. —*Ashlee Mitchell, writer and content creator*

Stray Kids, "Case 143"

A global arena tour and first Billboard no. 1 might make it easy to get comfortable, but far be it from Stray Kids to ever settle. Taking a sharp pivot from the demented world of "Maniac" (the single that first topped the chart), "Case 143" is a pole vault off the beaten path. Their first title love song features a bizarre blend of textures that soundtrack the type of falling in love that feels more like going insane. It's wacky, noisy, and patently Stray Kids, with a replay factor that earned a second Billboard no. 1, closing out their biggest year yet. —*Kika Chatterjee, entertainment and philanthropy consultant*

RM, "Wild Flower"

To understand the title track of RM's first solo album, "Wild Flower," which sprouted from the phrase "flower works," it helps to know that in Korean, "fireworks" translates into "fire flowers." That's BTS — a spectacle briefly lighting the sky, resulting from **unseen years of work**. Kim Namjoon is a wildflower who once dreamed of luminescence and now wants to waft in a field, nameless. RM and his layered word play link the two, resulting in an anthem both explosive and intimate. Notably, the soaring Icarus hook, "I'll scatter into the sky, Light a flower, flower work," is belted not by RM, but Youjeen of the South Korean rock group Cherry Filter. The song **took shape** during RM's night walks from Samsung station to Shinsa station, traversing Seoul's wealthy enclaves. You can imagine the inner poet would want to retreat into grass, shoeless, as Rolls Royces and Ferraris pass by. How someone who has it all would yearn for obscurity, if he could truly let the rest go. In "Wild Flower," Namjoon surfs the edge of what he wants and who he is. Just like the rest of us. —*Soo Youn, freelance journalist*

Take a look back through time at Teen Vogue's Best K-pop lists *from 2021 and 2020*.

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