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EXCLUSIVE

TWICE'S CHAEYOUNG ON GOING SOLO AND GETTING REAL: 'THIS IS THE REAL ME'

Pop star talks about her new album, *LIL FANTASY vol.1*, plus writing songs for her fellow introverts, working on the hit *KPop Demon Hunters*, and more

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COURTESY OF JYP ENTERTAINMENT

While it may appear that TWICE's Chaeyoung mapped out the release of her debut solo album, *LIL FANTASY vol.1*, to precede the girl group's 10th anniversary celebration in October, the rapper-singer-songwriter says it was more of a serendipitous coincidence. Her record was years in the making before she decided it was ready for her fans.

“I physically sat down to work on this album about a year ago,” Chaeyoung tells *Rolling Stone* in an exclusive interview in Korean over Zoom. “But overall, it took about two to three years to complete it. The first two years, I was committed to thinking, ‘What do I want to do with this album? What kind of music do I want to make?’ I

spent a lot of time getting my ideas together before it was time to execute my decisions. It honestly hasn't hit me yet that I have a solo album!"

Dressed in a casual but expensive-looking cap-sleeved T-shirt, Chaeyoung speaks with the confidence of someone who is proud of her work. Sitting in a conference room at JYP Entertainment's Seoul headquarters, she ponders her words as she discusses what she wanted to get across on her nine-song album. Make that 10 – physical copies include a CD-only hidden track. Chaeyoung is one of the most prolific songwriters within TWICE, and her imprint is all over *LIL FANTASY vol.1*, as a lyricist, composer, and arranger.

As the fourth member of the nine-woman supergroup to record her own album, Chaeyoung can be forgiven for taking her time with her debut. After all, TWICE has kept her busy touring the world with sold-out concerts. And then there are all the *firsts*: Their “Like Ooh-Ahh” became the first K-pop debut track to reach 100 million views on YouTube. They are the first female K-pop group to headline MLB and NFL stadiums in the U.S. Just this past summer, TWICE became the first K-pop girl group to headline on the main stage at Lollapalooza in Chicago. Their fourth full-length studio release, *This is For* — released in July — became their seventh consecutive album to hit the Top 10 on the *Billboard* 200 chart.

Chaeyoung describes TWICE's depth of talent as liberating. She is aware that not many groups are bold enough to release a full group album and a solo record within two months of each other. But she says no one was concerned about overkill *or* overshadowing the collective. As they've said in the past, one member's success is a victory for all of them. She's not in competition with anyone other than herself.

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Talking about the pensive “BF,” a song that she delivers with sweetness tinged with a little ennui, Chaeyoung mentions that her

job means she rarely gets to see friends from when she was younger.

“I’m basically a homebody and an introvert, so I don’t really reach out to them to hang out,” she says. “I think some of the friends felt upset that I didn’t contact them, and they left. So I just ended up with fewer and fewer friends. But at the same time, the stuffed toys I collect kept increasing. So I just ask myself, ‘Are they my real friends now?’ That’s how this song came about, because I don’t have a lot of friends.”

When reminded that she has eight very vocal friends, she laughs and nods her head, adding, “True, my bandmates are my friends! I just wanted to reflect on the loneliness that affects everyone at times.”

Welcome to LIL FANTASY CHAEYOUNG “AVOCADO(feat.Gliiico)”



On “AVOCADO” and “DOWNPOUR,” Chaeyoung collaborates with members of the genre-bending Japanese sibling act Gliiico, whose vibe intrigued her.

“When I had some off time, I went to Japan to meet up with Gliiico,” she says. “I remember thinking in my head, ‘They kind of look alike. Who are they? Are they brothers?’ I didn’t even know they were brothers!” Laughing at the memory, she adds, “They were so cool. I loved their music and their style. I invited them to one of our concerts in Japan and met them backstage, and we just started hanging out together, which led to working on songs for this album.”

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When it’s pointed out that her initiative doesn’t sound like something an introvert would do, she smiles and references her powerful cut “GIRL,” which is an ode to all the shy girls like herself. “I 100 percent do think that the quiet girls are powerful girls with their thoughts and minds. For me, rather than saying things out loud,

I am more comfortable listening to other people. I know that there are girls out there who are like me with similar tastes and attitudes in life. I wanted to write a song that they can empathize with.”

For Chaeyoung, 2025 has been a year of stepping out of her comfort zone. This included recording “Takedown” with fellow TWICE members Jihyo and Jeongyeon for the soundtrack of the hit Netflix film *KPop Demon Hunters*. At the end of the movie, the trio perform the song as themselves — the only non-animated artists featured.

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“We didn’t accept this because we knew it would be such a huge success,” she says. “It just sounded like a lot of fun. And personally, I love anime, so I was very curious to see how it was going to come out. The soundtrack itself is very different from our style, so it was an opportunity to challenge ourselves.”

But it wasn’t just TWICE they were interested in promoting, it was K-pop. “I’m very grateful and actually really awestruck,” Chaeyoung

says. “Whenever I read articles or see that the songs from the movie are topping the *Billboard* chart, I am really grateful we had this opportunity. We never imagined that *KPop Demon Hunters* was going to become an international sensation.”

Demons aside, Chaeyoung says that there was one part of the movie that she really related to.

“At concerts, we have to wait a really long time before we go on stage,” she says. “There’s the rehearsal and a lot of elements to deal with first. And when you wait for that long, you just get really hungry. So we sometimes eat right before we go onstage, like [Rumi, Mira and Zoey] did in the movie. That part rang really true to me.”

Just as *KPop Demon Hunters* has introduced K-pop to viewers previously unfamiliar with Korean songs, Chaeyoung says that one of the biggest compliments she receives is when people tell her they got into K-pop because of TWICE.

“I always feel so grateful when I hear that,” she says. “It makes me want to do better for them.”

Having already played in sold-out stadiums worldwide, Chaeyoung says that she still gets the jitters sometimes when she’s introducing new songs to her fans. But she felt calm when she debuted “My Guitar” on TWICE’s Ready to Be tour. (The song is included on *LIL FANTASY vol.1*.)

“The first time I performed ‘My Guitar,’ which is my first solo song, I had to get used to how I was performing it, because it’s not a dance song,” she says. “It’s just me sitting onstage and playing my guitar. I could really feel and sense the atmosphere, and I remember vividly looking at people’s faces when I sang that song. I could take it all in. Rather than being nervous, I just loved the moment. I try to make all of my songs meaningful, because you never know who will be impacted by them.”

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Part of the beauty of *LIL FANTASY vol.1* is that it’s a cohesive album representing the artistic and emotional growth Chaeyoung went through to become who she is today. She may have called or texted people she shouldn’t because she missed them, but she doesn’t beat herself up for extending an olive branch, a dynamic she explores in “BAND-AID.” Chaeyoung processes the time it took to overcome her struggles on “RIBBONS,” which she describes as a favorite. The CD-

only track “Lonely doll Waltz” closes the album with a gentle music-box piano sketch. And with “Shoot (Firecracker),” she celebrates her long-awaited solo career. But “Shadow Puppets” — a song about needing to hide her recognizable face so she can get by in society — is the only song that made her weep when she recorded her album.

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“I don’t think I put a clear line between my identity as an idol and my identity as just a person,” Chaeyoung says. “Of course I am a very responsible person, and I feel a heavy responsibility as a member of TWICE. But at the same time, I don’t try to differentiate who I am every day from my life as a celebrity. That is why I really do try to speak my voice as a member of TWICE whenever I do interviews [and with my music]. I feel that if I truly show my colors, maybe people will realize that this is the real me. I know it’s a slow process, but that’s what I hope for.”

IN THIS ARTICLE: CHAEYOUNG, K-POP, KPOP DEMON HUNTERS, TWICE
