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Katseye wants to be the biggest girl group on the planet

The Grammy-nominated singers are breaking out of the K-pop mold — and going global

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By [Ashley Fetters Maloy](#)

Just now

For the global girl group Katseye, making the band was a punishing pursuit chronicled for millions of viewers on the Netflix series “Pop Star Academy.” Twenty young women, chosen from an auditioning field of more than 100,000, began a year-long program of all-day, every-day dance training and vocal coaching in 2022. Every month, coaches evaluated them and made cuts, breaking the hearts of new friends and intensifying the competition.

And now, speaking from a hotel in Seattle in early December in their downtime on tour, the final six — now known as Katseye — are ... breaking into peals of laughter remembering how doggedly two of them recently hunted for dessert at midnight after a show in San Francisco.

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“Me and Sophia are, like, *big* dessert enthusiasts,” giggles Lara Raj, 20. “We love sugar.”

Formed in the K-pop tradition — that is, relentlessly focus-grouped and put through a wringer made up of dance trainers, vocal coaches and amorphous consultants who weigh in on intangibles like star quality and fan loyalty — Katseye popped out of the starmaking machine in 2023.

With members hailing from three continents, the group is an international spin on the K-pop group format that’s been popularized in recent years by acts like BTS, Blackpink, Twice and NewJeans. But Raj and Sophia Laforteza, 23; Daniela Avanzini, 21; Yoonchae Jeung, 18; Manon Bannerman, 23; and Megan Skiendiel, 19, are breaking out of

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the K-pop mold with a winsome emphasis on individuality and authenticity.



Global girl group Katseye performing at Jingle Ball in 2024 in Fort Worth. (Omar Vega/Getty Images for iHeartRadio)

Katseye officially debuted on the global music scene with the aptly titled single “Debut” in June 2024, followed by the EP “SIS (Soft Is Strong).” In 2025, the group released a second EP, “Beautiful Chaos,” which debuted at No. 4 on the Billboard 200, and two singles: “Gabriela,” a Latin-tinged earworm in the woman-to-woman, please-leave-him-alone tradition of “Jolene” with a Charli XCX songwriting credit; and the brash, noisy “Gnarly,” which finds the band rapping and drawling out spoken-word phrases.

“It was a weird song to be in pop music,” Raj says, “and I hope we keep doing things like that. Keep making people upset, but then they’re getting it stuck in their head.”

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Katseye also embarked on its first tour in 2025, with 16 dates spanning North America. But the group's real breakthrough moment came, arguably, with a Gap commercial. The ad revives the beloved '90s tradition of Gap-clad dancers performing against an all-white backdrop; the six women, decked out in denim and surrounded by a horde of dancers, throw down mesmerizing choreography to the Kelis classic "Milkshake." It debuted last August, less than a month after the Sydney Sweeney American Eagle jeans ad that was accused of promoting eugenics.

"We don't talk too much about how much the world really needed it," Laforteza says of the Gap ad. "It's something that we didn't realize until fans were coming up to us saying, 'We needed this now': like, six young women who are proud to be who they are, proud to look the way they do, proud of where they come from and how they grew up."

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Fans during Katseye's performance at the MTV Video Music Awards. (Mike Coppola/Getty Images for MTV)

Certainly, Katseye’s racial diversity sets it apart from K-pop groups. And as Jae-Ha Kim, a culture critic who specializes in Korean entertainment, puts it, the women of Katseye share far more of their personal lives with the public than most young K-pop idols — who don’t even date publicly — do. Last year, Skiendiel came out as bisexual and Raj came out as queer; Skiendiel often speaks openly about her use of antianxiety medications to manage her mental health. The members frequently emphasize that they prioritize individual health over perfect attendance at media events and even concerts. (When they spoke to *The Washington Post*, only five of the six were present; Avanzini was absent.)

“I like that they seem to be telling their fans the parts of their lives that could be difficult to talk about in public,” Kim says. “It helps a lot of fans with their own issues when you have a celebrity this beautiful and

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From left, Megan Skiendiel, Manon Bannerman, Daniela Avanzini, Yoonchae Jeong, Sophia Laforteza and Lara Raj of Katseye. (Dimitrios Kambouris/Getty Images)

In the world of K-pop, where group members accept that precision and uniformity take precedence over just about everything else, Katseye is a revelation. “I think that’s one of the reasons why they were such a huge, huge hit at Lollapalooza,” Kim says. “People were expecting something perfectly executed. Which they got, but they got all the weirdness and the emotion and the honesty with it, too.”

Katseye’s athletic, high-energy set at the Chicago festival in August combined the trappings of 21st-century pop performance (skimpy outfits, some suggestive girl-on-girl dancing) with touches of idiosyncrasy (like a costume change into billowing folk-dance-style skirts for a flamenco-inspired interlude and a breathless, exuberant admission from Raj that “that was the first time we ever performed ‘Gabriela’ live!”).

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With the North American tour over, Katseye will spend this spring touring in South America at international Lollapalooza events. In April, the group will perform at both weekends of Coachella in California. “Things we wanted to accomplish a year ago,” Bannerman says, “like performing at Coachella, going to the Grammys — a lot of it’s coming true, which is really, really surreal.” (Katseye is nominated for best new artist and best pop duo/group performance, for “Gabriela,” at the 2026 Grammys.)

And after that? “We really do have a vision to become the biggest girl group on this planet. We’re hungry for that. World domination,” Bannerman says with a laugh. “I want us to be known in the smallest villages out there. You know?”

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