


FUTURE 25

TWS HAVE RETRO VIBES, A FEEL-GOOD POP SOUND – AND A MEGA HIT

The Korean group is making waves with their "Boyhood Pop" music and their inventive choreography

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Pledis Entertainment

HANKEON HWANG

TWS — pronounced “Two Us” — are one of the most exciting and energetic young **K-pop** groups today. They’ve won praise for their music, their stage presence, and their model-like visuals. But they don’t take it for granted that anyone knows who they are. Which is why, when they log onto Zoom around lunchtime in Seoul to chat with *Rolling Stone*, Shinyu, Dohoon, Youngjae, Hanjin, Jihoon, and Kyungmin pepper their conversation with descriptors. Kyungmin, 18, introduces himself as the group’s *maknae* — or youngest — while several other members point out that Shinyu, 22, is TWS’ leader, as well as the eldest.

During this hour-long conversation, we start the interview off in Korean, but switch languages at times when it becomes clear that Jihoon’s English is very good, though he claims (in English!) otherwise. They sit three in front, three in back, all dressed in sweaters,

hoodies, and jackets. Though the HYBE conference room is sterile white, with fluorescent lights and blinds, the group members — who haven't sat through hair and makeup — all come across as warm, bright, and friendly.



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TWS are only two years into Boyhood Pop, as they call their genre, and they've already adapted their interpretation of "boyhood" as they've gotten older. For instance, they've chucked away the schoolboy uniforms they favored during their debut year for edgier techwear.

"We consider Boyhood Pop as a genre, a story, and a spectrum that is ever widening and broadening," says Jihoon. "It could be exciting, it could be peace and comfort, or it could be power and energy. But whatever we do, we want to exude that positivity for listeners."

Nodding, Youngjae suggests that their appreciation of retro music impacts how they view music today. "I love listening to those old-school songs that were released before I was born," he says. "People have told us they are reminded of their own youth when they listen to some of our songs. I think the fact that our group releases songs that can transport people back to the days of *their* youth is very fulfilling. It gives us a lot of confidence."

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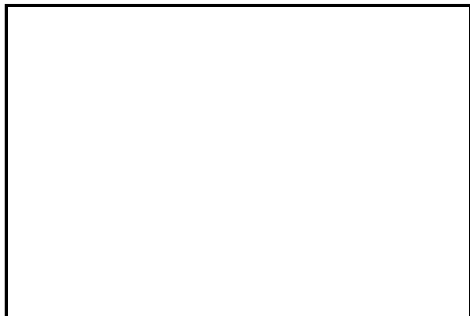
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Kyungmin adds, “We have packed in so many memories since our debut two years ago, and we have many stories to tell through our songs.”

Since debuting in January 2024 with their mini album *Sparkling Blue*, the six-piece group has embraced a feel-good pop sound that leans into retro vibes, lush harmonies, and clever wordplay. They’re exuberant, but with an edge. “Head Shoulders Knees Toes” kicks off with

propulsive rapping at the beginning, before segueing into gentle harmonies. The three-minute-plus earworm is more of a bombastic wakeup call than a nursery rhyme.

On their viral hit single “Overdrive” (19 million YouTube views and counting), they capture the newness of infatuation. Bolstered by fuzzy electric guitars, the song also provides the perfect moment for TWS to show off their *aegyo* — a quintessentially South Korean gesture of acting adorable that doesn’t always translate well overseas. For their version, TWS added an endearing shoulder shake to the choreography that enticed a slew of A-list Korean celebrities to imitate them.

“We were hoping it would blow up,” Dohoon says. “But it didn’t really sink in until we saw all the singers and actors dancing along on awards shows. That really helped amp up the excitement.”

The young men are singers and dancers whose music is exuberant and catchy, but they also are honing their skills as songwriters and choreographers. Dohoon and Jihoon contributed lyrics to their 2025 EP *Play Hard*, and Jihoon also worked on some of the group’s choreography for that promotional cycle.

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“I wasn’t nervous about it at all,” Dohoon says. “I took it on as a really exciting challenge. I was super intrigued and I had a lot of fun throughout the experience.”

Jihoon says he was “a little bit worried, because I really love our team and wanted to create the best version. But the experience was really exciting, too.”

Now that they’re no longer the newest K-pop idols on the block, I ask them if younger singers are asking for their advice. Ji-hoon cracks up, and Do-hoon says, “You know, it hasn’t been really long since our own debut, and we haven’t met any trainees who have come up to us and asked for our advice yet.”

Hanjin, who hails from China, is the group’s sole non-Korean member. Quiet and a bit shy, he says that while trainees may not have asked them for advice, *he* has relied on his five bandmates to help him navigate life in a new country. “Since I was the only foreigner, I had some things that I didn’t know about Korea at first,” he says. “Before our debut up until now, all the members have been so kind and patient with me, telling me stuff that I don’t know. And when they see that I’m struggling a bit or if I don’t know something, they always kindly walk me through it. We really have great teamwork.”

As we approach the end of our interview, the members take the opportunity to give a shoutout to the person sitting counterclockwise from them. Kyungmin begins, “I admire how Youngjae is calm and composed, even during nerve-wracking situations. He always manages to set up a plan and stick to that plan perfectly.”

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Youngjae says, “Shinyu is always considerate and takes care of us. He’s always very fast to catch on to things, making sure that nothing goes wrong and that we can do our best at all times. I admire his leadership so much.”

When it’s Shinyu’s turn, he looks at Hanjin sitting next to him and says, “Hanjin has such a kind heart. And the way he is fluent in both Korean and Chinese is so admirable and reassuring. He’s very trustworthy and reliable.”

Smiling, Hanjin says, “I have so many things that I have learned from Dohoon. Sometimes we’re all exhausted, right? But strangely enough with Dohoon, the more exhausted he is, the more energetic he becomes. I’d like to learn how to be like that from him.” Pausing, he asks if he can talk about Shinyu as well. “As the leader and the eldest of the group, Shinyu is so calm, collected, and composed,” Hanjin continues. “I am a person who tends to rush myself, so I really admire him.”

Dohoon quietly says, “Jihoon is so hard working and meticulous. I’d honestly like to know how he does every single thing so well.”

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For Jihoon, Kyungmin is the perfect *maknae* of the group. “If I have to narrow down what I admire about Kyungmin, I’d have to choose that he’s so hard-working and passionate. When we finish our schedule or practice, he is always in the practice room. He has such passion and discipline.”

That they admire each other is obvious. But as the eldest and the group leader, Shinyu proudly says he is in awe of how his bandmates have adapted to the rigorous idol life. “That four-year age gap [between Kyungmin and me] still feels quite big ... which may be why Kyungmin and the others are all so adorable to me. They are all [little brothers] to me. I’m

always blown away by how they're so cute in their day-to-day lives, but so charismatic [and mature] on stage. I feel like I am the one who has a lot left to learn from them as well."

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