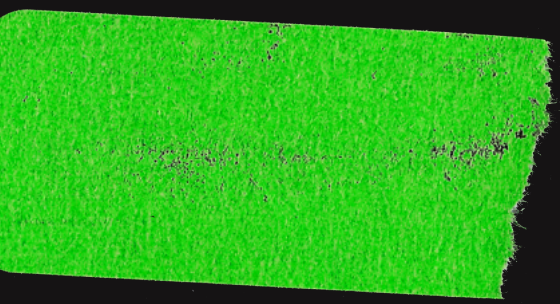
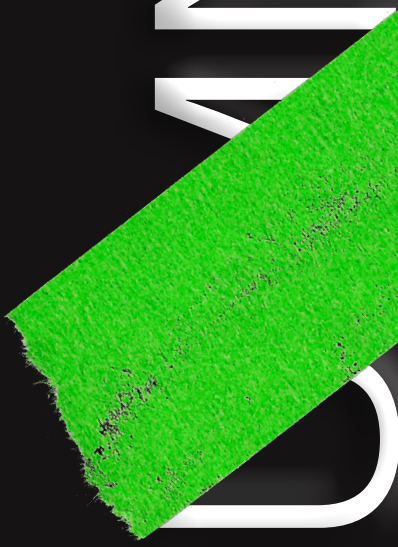
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Hello
my name is
ENVI


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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 CREATIVE SPOTLIGHT: HOW DEM JOINTZ FOUND A PRODUCER'S PLAY-GROUND IN K-POP

2 HOW NCT 127 MASTERED THE ART OF WESTERN STYLE ON "STICKER"

3 SUNSHINE AFTER RAIN: PETER CHUN ON WRITING FOR NCT 127 AND OTHER MUSIC STARS

4 STICKY TREATS AND DRINKS FOR DREAMERS

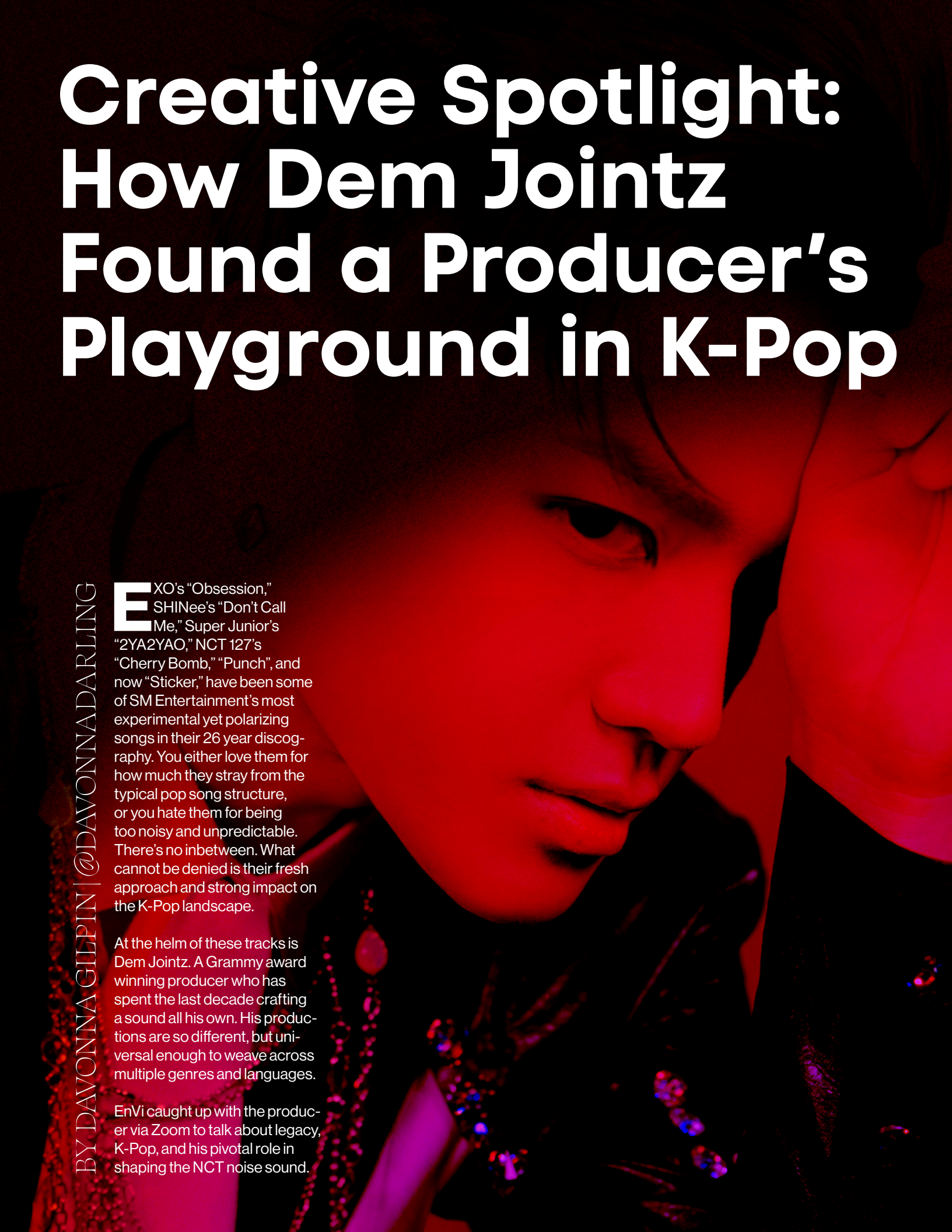
5 MEET THE CREATORS BEHIND NCT 127'S LEMONADE: BENJI BAE AND ROKMAN

6 THE ASTROLOGY OF STICKER

7 Q&A WITH BENJI & ROKMAN: THE CRE-ATORS OF NCT 127'S LEMONADE

8 NCT 127 SHARE THAT STICKER IS A GIFT FOR FANS

Creative Spotlight: How Dem Jointz Found a Producer's Playground in K-Pop



BY DAVONNA GILPIN | @DAVONNADARLING

EXO's "Obsession," SHINee's "Don't Call Me," Super Junior's "2YA2YAO," NCT 127's "Cherry Bomb," "Punch", and now "Sticker," have been some of SM Entertainment's most experimental yet polarizing songs in their 26 year discography. You either love them for how much they stray from the typical pop song structure, or you hate them for being too noisy and unpredictable. There's no inbetween. What cannot be denied is their fresh approach and strong impact on the K-Pop landscape.

At the helm of these tracks is Dem Jointz. A Grammy award winning producer who has spent the last decade crafting a sound all his own. His productions are so different, but universal enough to weave across multiple genres and languages.

EnVi caught up with the producer via Zoom to talk about legacy, K-Pop, and his pivotal role in shaping the NCT noise sound.

THE ORIGIN

Born Dwayne Abernathy Jr. in Compton, California, Dem Jointz always knew he had a gift in music. It wasn't until he got tired of working for someone else that he decided to deep dive into music production afro first in 2010 at age 34. The more you speak with him you realize his larger than life personality is not one to be contained to the average desk job. Even in the emails setting up the interview, he was so excited, speaking in all caps.

"It [was] one of those situations where you figure 'I don't want to work for anyone anymore,'" he said. As he talked he got up to dim the lights in his brightly lit studio, gesturing at them to silently communicate they were too much and he'd be right back. Once he sat back down at his desk he continued, "I wanted to switch things up. And I'm going to put my body into doing music, like full time."

Right away Dem Jointz secured A-list placements for artists like Rihanna. The new style production and unique samples on the track "Cockiness (Love It)," made it a stand out on her platinum selling 2011 album *Talk That Talk*. From there, it was full steam ahead and sleepless nights for the producer. He traveled across the world to work with everyone from musical legends like Janet Jackson, Brandy, and Christina Aguilera to fellow production trendsetters Dr. Dre and Kanye West.

DEM K-POP JOINTS

The heavy hitting producer was first tapped by SM Entertainment in 2015, when they reached out to him to work on upcoming tracks for their artists. First was girl group Red Velvet, where he had a hand in their album, The Red, with the track "Don't U Wait No More." He explained his good relationship with the label that he likened to family, and excitedly shouted out the A&R team that helped foster the partnership.

"They wanted to try me out on a few songs and it actually worked and became successful. We kept doing that again. And again."

Dem Jointz found a producer's dream playground in K-Pop. He was able to experiment with different sounds, textures and samples to bond his style and K-Pop's usual left of center, mixed genre style together to create some of SM's biggest hits in the last decade.

"The cool thing about it is, it doesn't matter how weird or experimental [what

Images courtesy of SM Entertainment

I send them] is. They see the vision, they understand and they go as far as I'm willing to go."

Whereas most of his songs tend to have deep bass, sharp instrumentals and synths, one song in his K-Pop discography sticks out. EXO's "Ya Ya Ya" from the group's sixth album Obsession relied heavily on a 90s R&B sample and more laid back production approach, which made it a fan favorite. When told the general sentiment around the song from K-Pop listeners is that it's perfect for all occasions: weddings, parties and barbecues, he laughed.

"Ya Ya Ya" was the brainchild of his and another frequent K-Pop contributor, Rodnae "Chikk" Bell. Chikk was already familiar with EXO's sound due to penning several of their earlier hits. Dem Jointz explained they just decided to give it to EXO, not expecting it to be picked.

"This is one of the songs that we gave them. We felt like 'yo that'd be crazy if they sang this' and they did. It came out and of course, the reception was crazy because we already knew this song is a smash. It's undeniable. I'm glad that they did it justice."

STICKING TO NCT 127

Without a doubt, the K-Pop artist he has worked with the most is NCT 127, the Seoul-based unit under the larger NCT umbrella. In the summer of 2017 the group released "Cherry Bomb," produced by Dem Jointz, in collaboration with SM's in-house team. The track was a step in the direction of developing NCT's "neo" sound, which quickly developed into what is known now as "NCT Noise."

The production featured distorted snare drums, oddly timed shouts, and sirens. But it came together in a fresh way that resonated with the audience to make it one of NCT 127's biggest hits.

Their relationship only strengthened when Dem Jointz produced the group's 2020 singles, "Kick It" and "Punch," from their million-selling album, NEO ZONE.

This year, he participated in their Japanese EP, LOVEHOLIC, producing R&B track, "Right Now."

The mention of the group immediately sends a smile onto the producer's face. As we discussed the role he played in helping shape their sound, he couldn't contain his excitement and shouted "aye aye aye!"

"It's super dope, that you're helping craft the sound...and that they're actually staying loyal to the sound, and they're following the vision. It just goes to show that they have the same vision and we all are on the same page in terms of where we're trying to go," he said.

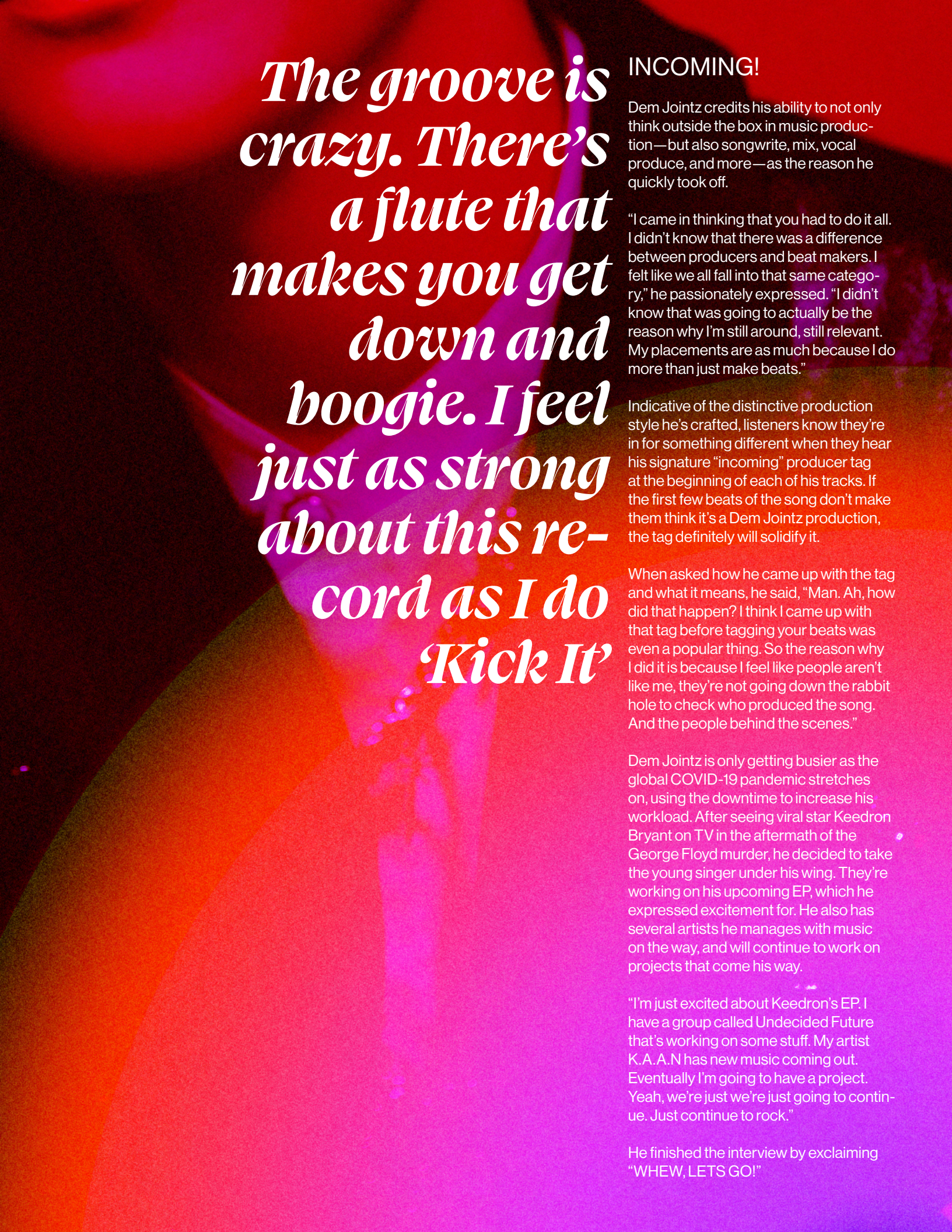
Dem Jointz was tapped again to produce "Sticker" from NCT 127's recently released album, *STICKER*. The album racked up 2.12 million pre-orders, as fans anticipated the group's return after a year-long hiatus.

"I feel like with [Sticker], we're going to take this to the moon, they're going to be huge." He said, "It's one of my favorite tracks."

"Sticker" begins with an oddly tuned flute and a distorted heavy bass that continues throughout the verses. The production almost seems empty until the pre-chorus fills it out with piano and harmonies. The song fits right into NCT 127's discography and captures that sound they've stayed loyal to. Dem Jointz talked a little about the process behind creating the song and tuning it up for NCT.

"Just being different. You want to stand out, but at the end of the day, you still want everybody to get what you're doing," he said. "The groove is crazy. There's a flute that makes you get down and boogie. I feel just as strong about this record as I do 'Kick It.'"

He also explained the song went through revisions prior to the final product. It also boasts production credits by Yoo Young Jin, Calixte, Prince Chapelle and Ryan Jhun.



The groove is crazy. There's a flute that makes you get down and boogie. I feel just as strong about this record as I do 'Kick It'

INCOMING!

Dem Jointz credits his ability to not only think outside the box in music production—but also songwrite, mix, vocal produce, and more—as the reason he quickly took off.

"I came in thinking that you had to do it all. I didn't know that there was a difference between producers and beat makers. I felt like we all fall into that same category," he passionately expressed. "I didn't know that was going to actually be the reason why I'm still around, still relevant. My placements are as much because I do more than just make beats."

Indicative of the distinctive production style he's crafted, listeners know they're in for something different when they hear his signature "incoming" producer tag at the beginning of each of his tracks. If the first few beats of the song don't make them think it's a Dem Jointz production, the tag definitely will solidify it.

When asked how he came up with the tag and what it means, he said, "Man. Ah, how did that happen? I think I came up with that tag before tagging your beats was even a popular thing. So the reason why I did it is because I feel like people aren't like me, they're not going down the rabbit hole to check who produced the song. And the people behind the scenes."

Dem Jointz is only getting busier as the global COVID-19 pandemic stretches on, using the downtime to increase his workload. After seeing viral star Keedron Bryant on TV in the aftermath of the George Floyd murder, he decided to take the young singer under his wing. They're working on his upcoming EP, which he expressed excitement for. He also has several artists he manages with music on the way, and will continue to work on projects that come his way.

"I'm just excited about Keedron's EP. I have a group called Undecided Future that's working on some stuff. My artist K.A.A.N has new music coming out. Eventually I'm going to have a project. Yeah, we're just we're just going to continue. Just continue to rock."

He finished the interview by exclaiming "WHEW, LETS GO!"



Illustration by Clauu

How NCT 127 Mastered The Art Of Western Style On "Sticker"

BY MAYRA PERALTA



Images courtesy of SM Entertainment

K-pop group NCT 127 has ridden into town—or rather NCity—with a brand new album and plenty of fashion inspiration. In true neo style, on September 17, the Seoul based subunit of NCT made their long-awaited return. Along with their third full-album, *STICKER*, the music video of their title track was unveiled to the world.

The high concept video offers a stimulating visual experience as it presents aesthetics reminiscent of the space cowboy genre. Anachronic elements, staples of Western film and NCT's overarching theme of technology mix in the music video for ""Sticker"." Amid computer-generated imagery and dynamic dance cuts, NCT 127 provides a style guide to modern Western wear.

THE YEEHAW AGENDA

A mainstay in menswear, Western fashion continues to inspire designers and brands around the world. Referenced in subtle ways or replicated quite literally, Americana is back in the mainstream scene. In recent years, the trend has made rounds on the runways and the entertainment spheres. Notable examples include brands like Pyer Moss, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and celebrities of the likes of Lil Nas X, Solange Knowles, or Lady Gaga.

NCT 127 embraces the "yeehaw agenda" by incorporating essentials of the Western aesthetics, from props for the music video to fashion items. Cactuses, screens displaying horses, a cowboy clothing shop, and even a giant hat serve as background for their performance. Dressed in staples like boots, oversized buckle belts, and paisley bandannas, the group adopts a modernized version of Americana.

BUT MAKE IT HIGH FASHION

The styling of "Sticker," however, lands in an intersection between "glam and cowboy," like Jessica Wu, PR of Peter Do, points out. The seamless incorporation of edgier, non conventional pieces achieves this purpose. Rivaling a fashion runway, their latest music video shows NCT 127 clad in custom made suits, all-white ensembles and unstructured fits. It also features a plethora of high fashion brands, including Prada, Saint Laurent, Rick Owens and, of course, Peter Do. Furthermore, loyal to their Seoul-based DNA, the group entrusted Korean rising brands like Tone, KOGWI, and Tikoonz to style them.

It is this fashion diversity that allows the group to flaunt a contemporary take of the Western trend. "It's particularly refreshing to see a global point of view in how our [Peter Do's] garments are reinterpreted and styled to complement each artists' vibe and/or album concept(s)." says Jessica about the styling. The PR expert and co-founder of Peter Do adds, "As an American Luxury brand, it's really exciting for us to be featured so prominently on various artists in the K-pop industry, especially because we're always blasting [their music] in the office."



MIX IT ACCORDINGLY

With the abundance of inspiration taken from it, the faithful representation of Western elements in "Sticker" is worth mentioning. However, what's more remarkable is the smart, present-time-appropriate styling. Take as an example the satin shirts with front yokes, pipings, and embroideries—signature details of West wear—combined with leather pants. Or the hyper-glamorized silver hats worn by Taeyong and Mark that contrast with their full white outfits.

Peter Do's Jessica Wu also concurs with the allure of mixing typical staples of Americana with contemporary pieces. "The distressed white denim from our Spring/Summer 2021 collection that Taeyong wore is one of our edgier everyday pieces and looks great in the styling direction for this comeback," she says.

YET, CONFIDENCE GOES FIRST

Traditionally, the cowboy depictions in pop culture are always linked to action and adventure. Demonstrating sartorial prowess is not enough to master the art of Western-style. As polarizing the trend is, navigating the cowboy lore requires the right attitude and mindset. Just like Jessica reflects, sometimes the strong vision of a brand—or in this case a trend—can make it appear that "the clothes are wearing you."

Fortunately, the members of NCT 127 are experts at showcasing their confidence. Exuding charisma and their overflowing talents, the nine guys can pull off any look. Naturally, it also helps that they are dressed by some of the best fashion creatives of the world.

"I think a common thread through all our collections is that our garments empower the wearer," the PR Director of Peter Do says. As an example, Jessica adds, "The jeans [featured in the music video of "Sticker"] are such a strong piece by themselves, but he [Taeyong] really breathes attitude and confidence into the garment when he wears it!"

It sounds about right.

Special thanks to Jessica Wu, PR Director of Peter Wu.



Illustration by Rebeca Gomes
@7thswnse

Meet The Creators Behind NCT 127's Lemonade: Benji Bae and Rokman

BY: CHYENNE TATUM

NCT 127 has built quite the catalog when it comes to their music. From bass-thumping, hip-hop tracks to smooth R&B ballads, there isn't an end of the spectrum the group hasn't conquered. Now, with the release of their third studio album, *STICKER*, another instant fan-favorite has knocked listeners off their feet.

"Lemonade," the second track off the album, was written and produced by K-pop veteran Benji Bae and K-pop newcomer, Rokman. Leading up to the album's release, EnVi sat down with both creators to find out more on the making of NCT 127's explosive B-side.



Images courtesy of SM Entertainment



HOW IT STARTED: A BLESSING IN DISGUISE

Between Benji and Rokman, their careers started in very different directions before they finally crossed paths. For singer-songwriter Benji, he was already classically trained in playing the violin and briefly attended Julliard.

Eventually, however, the now-29-year-old developed bigger dreams in music and moved to South Korea in 2011 to pursue them. From there, he debuted in a group called B.I.G in 2014 and promoted with them up until 2020.

Benji's creative palette expanded into music production, where he released his first self-composed and arranged single, "Telephone," in 2019. Since then, the Seattle native has been LA-bound, steadily improving his work behind the scenes.

Meanwhile, Rokman's been in the production game for a while, but is now on a learning curve when it comes to K-pop. "I've been in the music industry for about 10 years, professionally," he said. "Just doing a lot of licensing for commercials and music for EDM DJs—mostly Western stuff—but over the past year, I've been really interested in Asian music."

Like many Western songwriters and producers, Rokman found the appeal of K-pop in its intricate and complex arrangements. "I've always been really into it because, to me, it's just so much more interesting, on a lot of levels," Rokman said. "It made me realize how much more advanced K-pop is in its chord progressions; we've definitely been upping our game a lot."

That's when he and Benji first connected on Clubhouse back in February. "We actually met on an online dating app," Benji joked. "No, but a friend pinged me into a room that was talking about K-pop and the business of it, and I was just listening to him talk."

Rokman then chimed in and said, "I slid into his DMs hard." After that introduction, the two met up in LA, booked a session, and have been vibing ever since. "He drove out here, I got in his car, and the first words he said were: 'Well, this is roman-

tic.'" And thus, the tone of their friendship was solidified from day one.

HOW IT'S GOING: A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN

Since then, the duo has grown and learned from each other as collaborators, leading them to their first K-pop placement with NCT 127. Although both creators were hoping to work on the group's music, it was especially a long time coming for Benji.

"We were promoting at the same time about four years back, and I think they were doing "Limitless,'" Benji recalled. "I remember seeing their performance, and I've just been a huge fan since their debut [in NCT U], so I'd always wanted to make a track that I felt like they could do." Fast forward to 2021, and finally, "Lemonade" is born.

According to SM Entertainment, "Lemonade" is a hip-hop dance song with a strong 808 bass and minimal drop sound. On paper, it sounds very "127-esque," but in reality, the two creatives were unsure whether the song would fit the group or not. "We were worried that they weren't even going to take it," Rokman told EnVi. "We thought it was too left-field for any K-pop group, but NCT was our dream group."

At the start of production, Benji revealed the song was much more rap-focused than the final version. "We knew it was fire, but we just didn't know if it would hit." Interestingly, both Benji and Rokman described the song as "progressive," which is the embodiment of NCT in a nutshell. After changing and switching sections around to their liking, they finally found a style that fully represents 127.

"Yo, Rokman is crazy with the sounds," Benji smiled. "If you need something cool or something sexy... those are very different, and he knows that difference, 100%." Luckily, fans couldn't agree more in their reactions and memes once the "Lemonade" track video dropped. Tweets and comments were pouring in with showers of praise and a few very interesting nicknames to describe NCT's sound.

We thought it was too left-field for any K-pop group, but NCT was our dream group

Yes, both of them laughed when they heard the Transformers comparison. "That's actually cool —sometimes I do have sounds from the movie Transformers that I'll take and distort and sneak into certain songs," Rokman told EnVi. Meanwhile, Benji knew exactly what part of the song the fans were referring to. "That sound is hard, that's a vibe."

LEMONADE EXPECTATIONS, REACTIONS, & DELIVERIES

In the events leading up to "Lemonade's" placement, Benji and Rokman were unsure how well the 127 members would fit the song. Initially, they figured it would go to NCT's main rappers as a duo track. But the result was not only shocking to the creators, but incredibly rewarding, as well.

"As we were making it, I remember thinking of which members would fit which part," Benji said. "But then, 70% of the first draft just sounded like Taeyong and Mark, and I couldn't figure out where members like Doyoung or Jaehyun would fit into this.

"That's why we were so surprised to see Jaehyun take that rap in the beginning," Rokman added. "But I think they picked him because, in the demo, we had a lower octave voice there, so he definitely nailed that."

Fortunately, it was a huge weight lifted off their shoulders to find out how much the group resonated with "Lemonade." Out of the nine members, Mark, Jungwoo, and Yuta all chose the hip-hop track as their favorite on the album.





"There was a sense of relief in that the motifs and energy that we created putting into this record were understood and translated well with the members of NCT," Benji said. "So for multiple members to acknowledge that it's such an appreciative and warm feeling... I was like, 'let's go, kings!'"

Joining in, Rokman echoed his appreciation. "Just seeing them react to it in a way that's exciting, and seeing the fans leave us comments, it's so crazy," he said. "Benji's been a rockstar for years, but for both of us to experience this together, it's exciting."

When EnVi asked if the two had any favorite parts or members, they did not hesitate to give enthusiastic answers. "I love Haechan," Benji admitted. "I love the hell out of that dude." But as for Rokman, he said, "There's a lot of them, but I really love Yuta's parts."

With the song representing NCT 127 melodically, how do the lyrics fit into that category? "One of the lyrical conundrums we had was, 'do we want to connect this to a love song in any way?'" Benji asked. "But then, the process ended up being less of a romance and more, 'sweet like lemonade' ... meaning, life is sweet for me because I've been working so hard."

Surprisingly, the demo version is reminiscent of a handful of 127's past tracks. It's about the idea of climbing the ladder until they've reached their peak. As Rokman pulled up the lyrics, he said, "We originally wrote, 'All work and no play, at the top of the chain and it's sweeter than lemonade.'"

At the time of this interview, the duo couldn't give away too much info on the Korean translations. But hopefully, the overall message remains the same and highlights NCT's trajectory in chasing their dreams. "In a way, this is a truthful story for us too," Benji confessed. "We have a lot more coming that we can't say yet, but we're just super thankful for this experience and for meeting each other."

Listen to "Lemonade" on NCT 127's album, *STICKER*, available on all platforms!



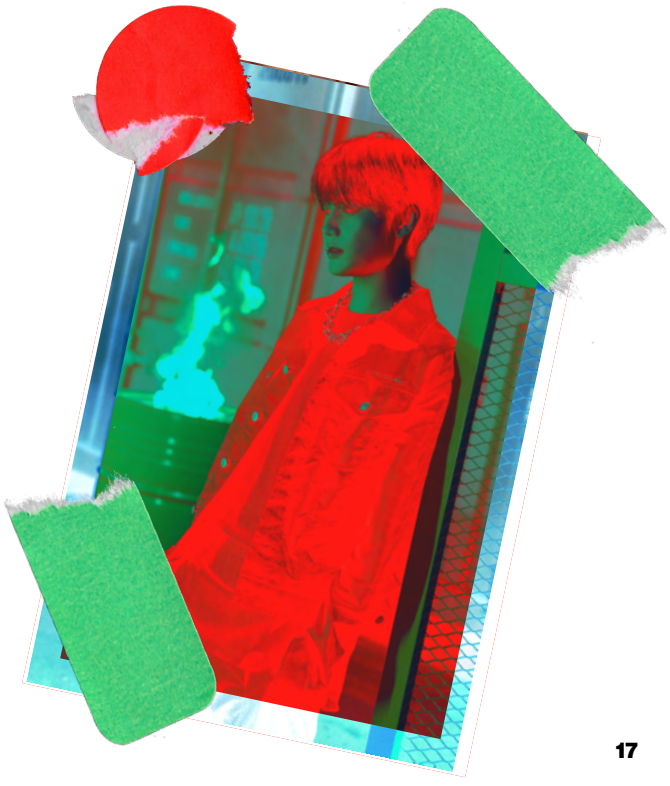




Illustration by Nevi Gaetan
@Eraaxis

STICKER *Lemonade*

Breakfast FOCUS

The Rainy Night

FAR

BRING THE NOIZE

Magic Carpet Ride

ROAD TRIP

Dreamer

PROMISE YOU


Illustration by Jenessa Edora
@neotempura
Jenpura

NCity Eats: Sticky Treats and Sides of Lemonade

It's hard to deny that "Sticker" was a meal— NCT 127 served throughout the video. What is perfect to enjoy with a meal? Dessert and drinks. Here is a list of Team EnVi's sticky treats and drinks in our latest NCity Eats column.

CLOUD BREAD

"PERFECT FOR ANY DREAMER"

TAYLOR | @TAYLOR_LOUISE M

Ingredients:

10g of cornflour
40-60g of caster sugar
3 large eggs (whites)
Food colouring (optional)

Directions

01. Whisk all three ingredients together until they reach a soft peak
02. Once whisked and fluffy, spoon onto a baking tray (lined with greaseproof paper)
03. Cook in the oven (fan 180) for roughly 10-15 minutes or until cooked through and golden on top

Tip: if you don't want to add colour, gently work in a flavouring before cooking. This is more of a savoury dish but the flavouring can make it sweet!

TASTE LIKE "LEMONADE"

"A SIMPLE LEMONADE SMOOTHIE"

MAFE RAMOS | @MAAFERPAULO

Ingredients:

Lemons
Greek yogurt
1 Banana
1 cup of water or coconut water
Crushed ice

This is an easy recipe for those who have trouble in the kitchen but want to spice things up!

Directions:

04. 1. Pour the lemon juice, greek yogurt, and 1 medium-size banana into a blender
05. 2. Add the water or coconut water
06. 3. Add crushed ice
07. 3. Blend everything on high until it has asmooth consistency
08. 4. Pour into a tall glass.

Tip: You can add other ingredients if you would like, for example, you can use strawberries or cherries to make a pink lemonade smoothie.

"GOT ME FEELIN' GOOD"

BLACK LEMONADE

@LUVJYANI

Ingredients

(for 8 servings):

10 lemons (cut in half)
Ice
Water
Black sesame powder (½ - 1 tbsp)
Honey to taste

Directions:

01. Start by cutting your lemons in half and juicing them (this can be done manually or with a juicer.)
02. Pour your lemon juice into a pitcher and set aside.
03. In a heat safe bowl, heat up your desired amount of honey until it's a thinner consistency.
04. Once melted, mix in the black sesame powder until thoroughly combined. Once combined, add the warm honey into the pitcher with the lemon juice. Mix very thoroughly until the honey is melted and the mixture is an even, black color.
Add enough water to fill up the pitcher
Throw in some ice to keep it chilled.
Serve it up and enjoy an earthy yet sweet drink!





Image courtesy of SM Entertainment

Edit by Alex
@Xisualty

Sunshine After Rain

Peter Chun on Writing for NCT 127 and Other Music Stars

2021 has been an eventful year for producer and songwriter Peter Chun. He contributed to Just B's debut mini-album, worked on BamBam's riBBon, and received a certified gold for his work on Gwen Stefani's album. To top things off, he crafted the track "The Rainy Night" on NCT 127's latest album STICKER which has already sold over 2 million copies. EnVi sat down with Chun to talk about his latest achievements and impressive career in the music industry.

JUMPING IN PUDDLES

Chun and his family came to the United States as first-generation immigrants from South Korea. His mother played the haegeum in an orchestra and his father was a guitarist in a band. Understanding the hardships of the industry, they were concerned when Chun shared that he wanted to pursue music. They had preferred he opted for a more traditional career, but he chose to follow his passion instead.

As an engineer, he worked on Gwen Stefani's You Make It Feel Like Christmas which went gold. At the time, he had reached a high level in his career and was working with A-list celebrities. Working behind the scenes, he was amazed by the songwriting process.

"I will never forget that experience. She's also an extremely hard worker. I got to say, she holds herself like in the room," Chun said about working with Stefani.

"When they did, You Make It Feel Like Christmas, Blake actually sent the whole hook as a voice memo. And then she heard it, and then they just wrote this song in like 30 minutes. They finished the song off and we recorded almost all the vocals that day. So, we did that song in like two hours. And I was just sitting there and I just pressed the record and I was like, 'What? Just wait, what just happened right now? Like holy cow,'" he told EnVi.

Amazed by the process, Chun wanted to try writing himself. He said, "Because I saw Gwen and busbee and Justin Tranter. I was like, 'I can do that. If they can do it, I can do it. Why not?'"

He decided to take the leap of faith and left his job to become a songwriter and producer.

RAINY NIGHT, SUNNY DAY

On a personal level, the growing success of K-pop internationally resonated with him.

"I'm proud. It's like the first thing that comes to my mind," Chun shared. "When I was growing up in high school and even middle school, elementary, I never wanted to be Asian. I never wanted to have Asian features. I lost a lot of my Korean because I didn't want to speak Korean."

"The fact that Asian culture, music, or fashion or food is...being at such a forefront. It really makes me proud. And like, it's only till five years ago where I was like, I'm actually really proud to be Asian."

Chun spent five years trying to have a K-pop song released. Having left a stable and well-paying job, he grew concerned about the logistics of artistry. At the start of this year, he decided it would be his last in songwriting if he didn't reach his goals.

In contrast, he began to see great success. Within the year, he worked with various artists on an impressive list of projects. For rookie group Just B, Chun wrote two tracks, "Deja Vu" and "Double Dare" on their debut mini-album. He shared that he still remembers hearing the Just B songs for the first time on a McDonald's run with co-writer Drew Ryan Scott, or SQVARE.

"I actually got sent their mix to get checked up, which that really doesn't happen with veteran groups," Chun explained. "I was like, 'How are these rookies? Like they sound so good.'"

Images courtesy of SM Entertainment

"I think how easy they were able to work with this, I want to do more with them. You know? Like these guys are amazing," He added.

That same month, his song "riBBon" was chosen as BamBam's debut solo single as well. He originally began working on the song during the quarantine of June 2020 after being inspired by Lil Mosey's "Blueberry Faygo."

"And I heard that and I was like, why isn't anyone in K-pop doing this? Kind of like a, I don't want to say bright R&B, hip-hop, but like, it was more like an uptempo, brighter sound. I kind of made it a guitar loop and I was just jamming to it."

He then sent it to his co-writers Scott and Andreas Carlsson. Together, they created the draft that was sent to BamBam and his team who completed the final touches.

Due to BamBam's success with GOT7, his first release as a soloist was highly anticipated and well-received by fans.

"I really am glad of the outcome," Chun said. "I didn't know what BamBam's sound was because he was in GOT7, so it was like GOT7's sound and, you know, everyone was doing their own solo at the time. I just love [that] the outcome that they put is kind of like a perfect balance. It's like, they called it playful trap. That's what they described it to me. And I was like, 'Oh, that's perfect.'"

JUST DROPPED

Between the high-energy songs of *STICKER*, "The Rainy Night" is a serene moment showcasing NCT 127's vocal range. For that to happen, Chun and Scott worked meticulously behind the scenes. Recognizing its power as a "piano-driven" ballad, Chun and Scott crafted it with the intention of having it appeal to both K-pop and Western music markets.

"I was actually sent an instrumental from one of the guys that works with SM saying, 'Here's a song. Can you just run?' And I heard it. I was like, 'Oh, it's a tear-jerker,'" Chun recalled. "We were just writing like a really sad song and just like really catered [to] it. Like, every section. We wanted it to be great."

The whole process only took them an hour. Chun explained, "I do remember that hook was just like us just going back and forth. Like, you'll do like a line and then I'll do it. And it just felt so natural."

"WE WERE JUST WRITING LIKE A REALLY SAD SONG AND JUST LIKE REALLY CATERED [TO] IT. LIKE, EVERY SECTION. WE WANTED IT TO BE GREAT."

Chun has cited EXO as a source of inspiration before. Creating a song for their labelmates, he highlighted the notorious vocals of SM Entertainment.

"When it comes to like all vocal arrangements in any song, whether it's like an EXO style or a bright song, I try to arrange it how I first heard EXO with their harmonies, with the background arrangements, and stuff," Chun shared. "So like, I would say a lot of the vocal arrangements are kind of inspired by EXO."

Chun still remembers how the song stuck with him and Scott as they worked on it. He believes it will stick with fans as well. "It's like the melody and the hook still for me, even," he shared.

"We both pretty much remembered a hook right away. Sometimes I'll forget. I'll be like, 'How did it sound again?' But it was one of those where I was like, 'Man, these notes are like something happened where we got transcended to a different dimension on this one,'" Chun said.

He added, "So, the melody on the hook, I think people were really like. It'll hit really hard for them, you know? And especially the title 'The Rainy Night.' I mean, come on now."

CLEAR SKIES AHEAD

After reaching all these different accomplishments, one might think it's time to relax. However, Chun is the opposite.

"I feel like I have to work harder, to be honest," Chun said. "I'm like a workaholic. People that work with me know I'm the first one at the studio, I'm the last one to leave."

Chun is motivated by his parents and the selfless decisions they made for their family. It was the same reason why he decided to open his gold certification with them.

He explained, "It felt great for me, but I wanted it to be for them to be honest, because they sacrificed their careers, like halfway through like their thirties, to come here for me and my brother."

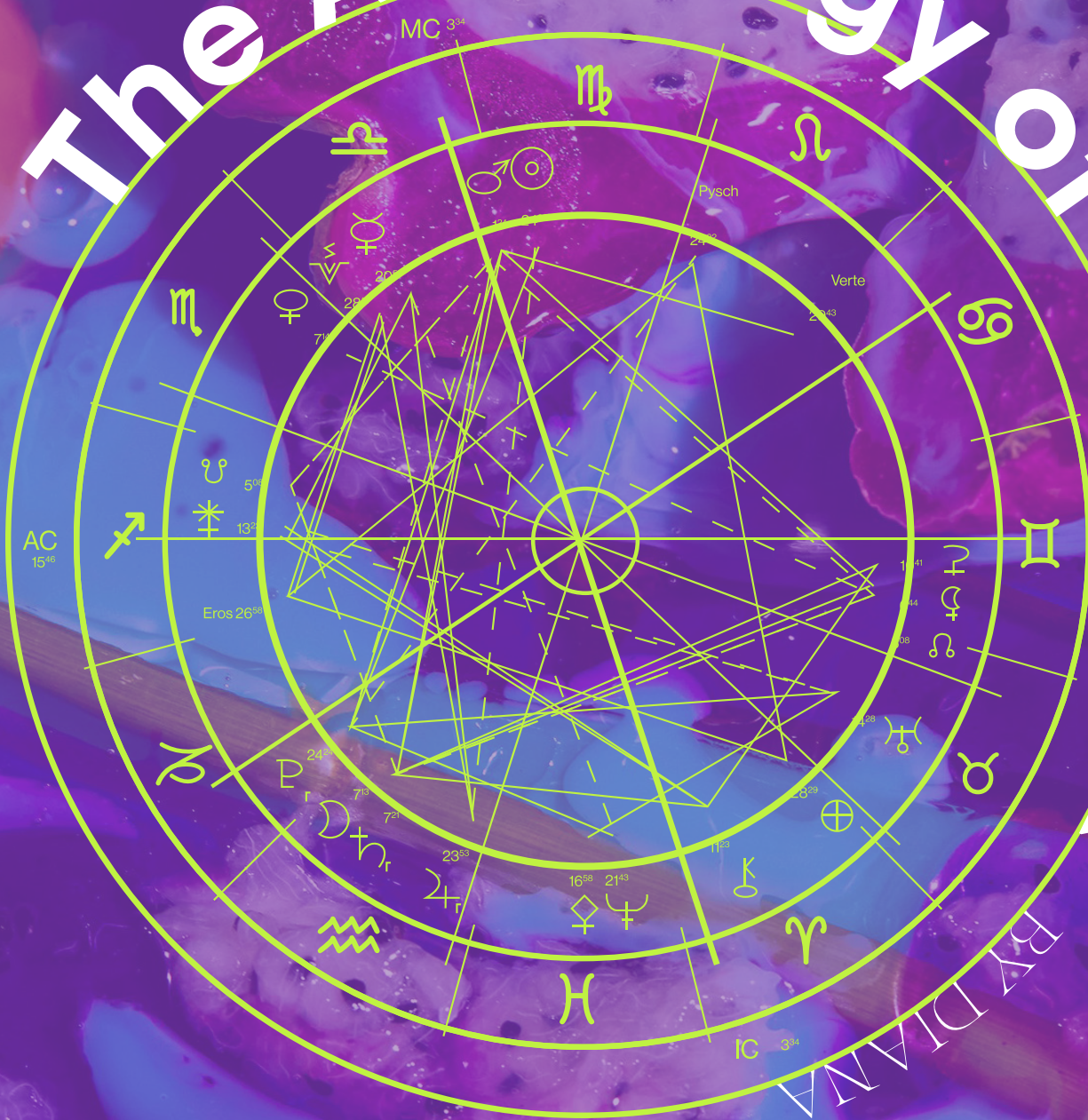
More so than the titles, Chun cherishes memories like those and hopes to make more. Fittingly, he already has two more noteworthy projects coming soon.



Illustration by Nevi Gaetan
@Eraaxis


TEENAGE
DREAM

The Astrology of STICKER



BY DIANA

Images courtesy of SM Entertainment

"THE STICKER ERA ALSO SEEMS TO BE POLARIZING IN TERMS OF SOUND"

STICKER has its ascendant at 15° Sagittarius, signifying that after a long long hiatus, this is a special project. Because of the delay, some people may have expected something different than what came out. Ultimately, this comeback is more successful because of the sheer expansion and growth NCT 127 has had since NEO ZONE.

The first house ruler is in the second house. However, it is retrograde, likely signaling a more grounded sense of style and values rather than the explosive, futuristic comebacks we've seen in the last few years. This was meant to be a shift, something unexpected, and a new side of NCT 127 that we hadn't seen before.

The second house begins at 19° Capricorn, indicating a level of imitation and adaptation. This is in the styling choices, which seem to be inspired by NCT 127's last live performance at the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo in 2020. The moon, Pluto, Saturn, and Jupiter form a stellium in the second house, with the latter three celestial bodies being in retrograde. This turns the focus inward on personal values and how their style affirms their self-image. There is a lot of emphasis on visuals in this era, and they were intentional with their choices. There's also overwhelming energy around money and likely immense pressure to do well due to the dramatic increase in sales.

The second house ruler is in the second house, providing a shaky ground for self-worth, although it may be less challenging to summon positive feelings towards themselves. This may also signify the group members are putting extra pressure on themselves to do well during the performances since they haven't been able to tour. The *STICKER* era also seems to be polarizing in terms of sound, but that is a staple of the NCT sound.

The third house is in 27° Aquarius, with Neptune retrograde in Pisces. This house and the ninth house intercept, indicating that they have to work harder to connect with their international fans, but they seem to have that awareness with the Neptune retrograde in this house. They seem to have very clear goals and objectives in mind, and appear to be determined to execute these. The activities they have planned are not an accident, and they are deliberately making an extra effort to connect. This comeback feels grounded in the deep understanding they have of their audience, although they may be apprehensive about the audience reception.

Their third house ruler is in the second house, which seems to indicate that the

inspiration was taken from everyday things rather than a more abstract concept as NCT 127 has done in the past. This approach feels like a way to bring fans closer to them, as they incorporate parts of their world into the NCT universe.

The fourth house begins at 3° Aries, with Chiron retrograde in this house opposite Mars. The reaction from their domestic audience is quite positive, and NCT 127 seems to be connecting with Korean fans off the bat, more so than the international audience. They have Mars, and the sun intercepted in the ninth house, so although they had a clear purpose, it feels like they just missed the mark initially with international fans. However, with these outer planets in the second house, I feel fans will eventually gel with the song and realize the thought that went into the song.

Uranus falls in the fifth house in this chart, signaling an unexpected or sudden change, and this clearly seems to reflect in the song's sound. It has a very different feeling from "Punch" or "Kick It," but it's deliberate. All the choices in the song were made for stylistic purposes, to set this era apart from previous releases. This feels like a transition era into something more significant, so it would be wise not to expect a similar release for the next comeback.

The north node is in the sixth house. Once again, this is not their defining comeback but instead seems to mark a transition into something else. The plot will likely thicken in the future, perhaps as the SM Cinematic Universe expands and listeners learn more about the lore within Kwangya. This will likely be a solid era for the group, but it doesn't seem like it will be a hit on par with Girls' Generation's "Gee," or TVXQ's "Mirotic." However, things feel like they'll go up from here, so save for NCT tickets while you can.

The seventh house is in Gemini, and while it is empty, the seventh house ruler is in the tenth house. It feels like the engagement between the group and the fans will be the highlight of this era. I see NCT 127 understanding what fans want and having a positive time engaging with their fans this era, and it will likely go over well with their audience. In the past, there have been some challenges with engaging all parts of the fandom, but it feels like this era will be balanced in terms of fan interaction, both domestic and international.

The eighth house begins in Cancer, with the eighth house ruler in the second house. As previously mentioned, the issues that will potentially pop up in this era are related to self-worth and values and defining their style. This seems to be a nice transition into the group defining themselves, as it seems the members have more of an emotional connection to this body of work than they did with previous album releases. Everything is out on the table, and it's very apparent.

The ninth house begins in Virgo, with the sun in Virgo and Mars in Libra. Both of these planets intercept, so the energy is harder to unlock than it usually would be. NCT 127 very clearly drew inspiration from their time promoting at the rodeo in March 2020. They did a fantastic job incorporating these elements into the video, but somehow, this didn't connect with international fans right away. It feels like they will as time goes on, and fans will come to appreciate how "Sticker" set up the next comeback the way it did. This is the beginning of a transition in NCT 127's discography and career as well.

The tenth house begins in Libra, with Mercury sitting in this house. Their versatility and performance seem to shine in this era, as do their writing talents. They were more involved in this release than previous ones, and it feels like they took their time to get everything just right. NCT 127 highlight this with the



lyrics, and it feels authentic and fun. The writing on this project is next level, and the public resonates with their work.

The eleventh house is in Scorpio, with Venus sitting in this house. Their friends and associates will likely benefit from this era's success, though not as much as they could if Venus were not in a sign of detriment. NCT 127 is hoping to connect with their fans, and it seems they will be quite effective in utilizing social media to make this connection. Given the current situation, they have to be creative with reaching fans, but it feels like they will be able to do so and create a strong bond with their fans.

The twelfth house is in Scorpio, and while it remains empty, the twelfth house lord is in the ninth house. It seems like NCT 127 may feel disappointed in not connecting with fans as much as they want, and it feels like they want to get out and travel more. However, this is setting them up for future comebacks, and it may push them to think about adding multiple dates for different cities as they continue on this trajectory. The frustration will not last forever, and things will improve for them in the future. Overall, this is a very positive comeback, and there is a lot of learning that will come from this.

OVERALL, THIS IS A VERY POSITIVE COMEBACK

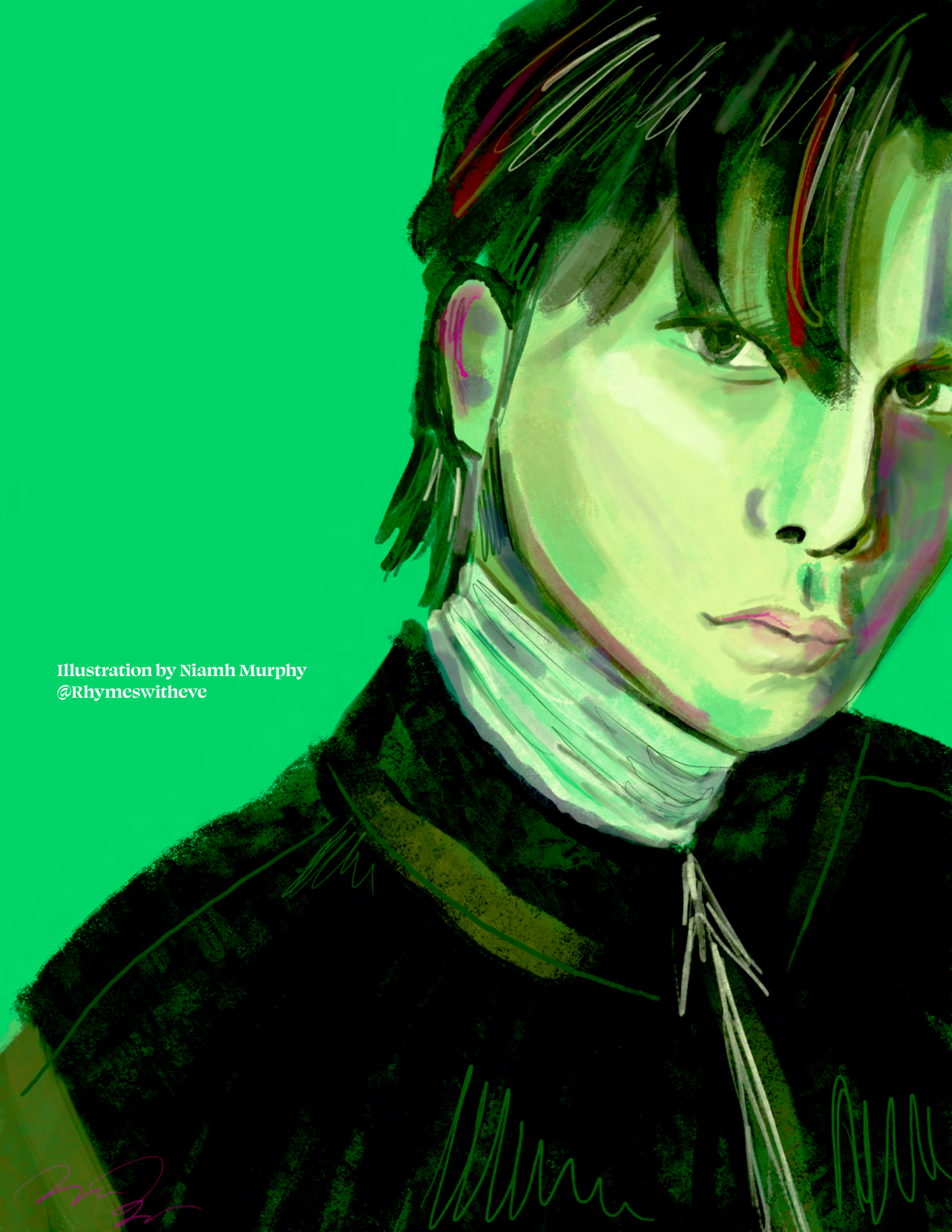


Illustration by Niamh Murphy
@Rhymeswitheve

Q&A with Benji & Rokman: The Creators of NCT 127's Lemonade



Images courtesy of SM Entertainment

NCT 127 is finally back with the release of *STICKER*, their first studio album since 2020's Neozone. Although every NCT comeback is a party in Neo City, this era is sure to be unforgettable—especially for the creators behind it. For writers and producers Rokman and Benji Bae, it's the first era of many more to come.

EnVi caught up with the creatives for a two-part interview to discuss the creation of NCT 127's "Lemonade." For part two, they've answered your online questions and revealed which member they'd love to work with solo. Read all about it in the Q&A below.

BY CHYENNE TATUM



DREAM FEATURE

EnVi: If "Lemonade" featured another artist, who would be your dream feature for NCT 127?

Benji: Ooh, okay this is going to be so different! Because outside of K-pop, I'm super into alternative R&B, hip-hop... and he's just another dude [points at Rokman].

Rokman: [laughs]. I don't know, honestly. I didn't think about it.

Benji: I know I'm going to get a little flack for this, but I think G-Eazy would sound good on this track. Or even Ski Mask the Slump God.

Rokman: I hear Benji Bae as a feature.

Benji: Oh yes, me!

DREAM COLLAB WITH A MEMBER OF NCT

EnVi: If you could write or produce a solo album for any member of NCT, who would it be, and what would it sound like?

Benji: Oh no, you're going to make me pick? [To Rokman]: Do you have something?

Rokman: I would love to do a solo project for Mark. I love just how cutting and clear his voice is, and he can speak multiple languages super clear — his tone is just very versatile and matches my style. And he can sing — a lot of people don't get to hear him sing much, but he could do some great crossover stuff.

Benji: This is a hard question. I'm going to go for two — I feel like Taeyong has a lot of versatility that could be super cool with some very non-K-pop style rhythms and instruments. But, I love Haechan — he just kills everything he does and he's just so freaking cute. In his NCT Dream projects, he kills it. In 127, he does a really good job, and I just think he has so much potential. Like, in my opinion, Haechan reminds me of Taemin from SHINee, because Taemin has always been really cool, but when he started coming out with his solo stuff, that's when we were really able to see the artistry that he wanted to put out.

TASTES LIKE LEMONADE

EnVi: If "Lemonade" were a dish, how would you describe the taste of the meal?

Benji: Sweet like lemonade, baby!

Rokman: I cracked up because there are all these memes that people have been making about "Lemonade," and it's just so funny. But after seeing the music video, it changed for me.

Benji: Yeah, me too. I would say before it was a very intense kind of sweetness, then now for me, it's like a spicy sweetness. Like, you know how in certain Mexican dishes, they add spice on top of sweet things? After seeing the track video and how they carry it, I think it's sweet, spicy, and easy to eat. You don't have to try hard to do it, but it hits with every bite.

Rokman: I'm seeing lemons cut on a grill with the fire just burning the lemons, and then somebody hitting it with a hammer on a steak.

Benji: Wait, now I want to change mine! It's lemon cake with a little pepper inside.

Rokman: [laughs]. You didn't even say a lot of pepper or a huge jalapeño.

Benji: Wouldn't you rather eat a spicy lemon cake than burnt lemons beat with a hammer?

Rokman: I didn't say lemons beat with a hammer; I said there was a steak and someone's hammering the lemons on top to tenderize it or something. I don't know.

Benji: See? I win, moving on.

PUTTING THEIR STAMP ON NCT'S SOUND

EnVi: How did you find a balance between having "Lemonade" sound very 127 while also pushing their sound forward?

Benji: I'm honored that that's even a question; I'm not gonna lie.

Rokman: That's a really cool question. I think, writing-wise, everything up to the chorus kind of made sense. One thing that helped is that sonically, everything was really tight — it was very simple, but it had a big impact. And when the chorus hit, that's the part that really pushed things more progressive than what we were expecting — that was just a gamble. We were worried because we hadn't heard that before.

Benji: To add to that, I do want to say that when we were writing the track and when we already had a certain kind of image, we were thinking about stuff that NCT hadn't done. So, lyrically or with the flows on the track, what is something that —when done by NCT— is still identifiable but doesn't sound like someone tried to force a rap section into a song?

Rokman: We actually did think, specifically, about what we can do that we haven't heard done already. Either way, even the slower songs they've put out are so awesome — they've painted a cool picture, and I feel like this whole album is going to be their best one.

NCT 127 AS MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

EnVi: Can you assign a musical instrument to each member of 127?

Benji: Ooh, now that's a K-pop question for sure. Can we do a rapid-fire round where you just throw out a name, and we'll say an instrument?

EnVi: Absolutely! First up is Taeil.

Rokman: Bongo!

Benji: [laughs]. Okay, yeah.

Rokman: Wait, maybe percussion. Let's just say percussion, that sounds a little better.

Benji: [laughs again]. It sounds the same, dude.

EnVi: Okay, next is Johnny!

Rokman: Fiddle!

Benji: Nah, bro.

Rokman: Harmonica.

Benji: No, no, no. Bass guitar.

EnVi: Okay, we'll take bass. How about Jaehyun?

Benji: Ooh...handsome.

Rokman: I would say bass for him because of the low voice.

Benji: I think cello because Jaehyun is mad classy and Johnny is cool, but like, in a really casual way.

EnVi: Okay, Doyoung?

Benji: Hmm, flute?

Rokman: I don't know, those three have such a similar aura — it's so hard to separate instruments for them. I'll say bassoon.

Benji: Run it.

EnVi: Okay, bassoon for Doyoung. Next, is Jungwoo.

Rokman: Oh gosh, that's clarinet.

Benji: Yeah, clarinet.

EnVi: Unanimous — nice. What about Yuta?

Rokman: Drums; I think he'd be a good drummer.

Benji: You know what? I'm going to say the triangle. Because he's not the member who always gets the most lines, but he does add his own special spice to it.

Rokman: I'm probably thinking drummer because he came in on the pre-chorus in "Lemonade." And he was just like, boom, in your face.

Benji: Oh, that's true. We're still going with triangle, though.

EnVi: Triangle, it is. Now, we're on Haechan.

Rokman: I thought acoustic guitar. When I think electric, I think of Mark.

Benji: Oh yeah, we'll run that! Haechan is acoustic guitar, and Mark is electric.

EnVi: Any reason why?

Benji: With acoustic guitar, yeah, you can manipulate it, but it's very warm-sounding — I think Haechan's voice is super warm. Mark knows how to throw his

voice around, and that's an electric guitar linked up to an amp, peddles — however you want to do it, he knows how to do that.

Rokman: Yeah, Mark's voice sounds like a cutting lead.

EnVi: Awesome, lastly is Taeyong.

Rokman: If I was thinking of it in band form, I would think of him as the lead singer and the other guys play the instruments.

Benji: [jokingly]. That's not the answer to the question — she asked for an instrument, dude.

Rokman: I know, but if I'm visualizing all these other people playing instruments, now I'm just visualizing him as the singer.

Benji: Oh, I got it! I would say the keyboard.

Rokman: Yeah, I'd go keyboard.

EnVi: Why is that?

Rokman: Versatility — it could be upfront, it could be in the background. That's a good one.

Benji: But it always hits wherever you put it.

FUTURE PLANS & GOALS

EnVi: Is there anything you look forward to next or hope to achieve?

Benji: Definitely want to continue making music and working with "Rok." I'm also working on my solo album, and all the music that I've done with Rok has greatly affected that process. Now that "Lemonade" is out, I'm going deep in my own projects.

EnVi: Will it be similar to "Telephone"?

Benji: Yo, you're not ready. I showed Rok this track the other day, and oh man, I'm excited.

EnVi: Looking forward to it! Rok, what about you?

Rokman: I kind of just stepped into the Asian music world recently, and it's like my super passion. I listen to podcasts every day, and I research members to sort of catch up with the world, you know? I'm just excited to continue making music for this industry and finding ways to do it differently. Also, I have an artist project in the works as a producer/collaborator, and that's it. I'm just really going hard on K-pop and collaborating with Benji.

Benji: And we also want to meet NCT.

Rokman: Yeah, let's be best friends or something.

TO THE WORLD

As NCT 127 continues its path to international stardom, the two collaborators are just happy to be along for the ride. From similar musical styles to their sense of humor, Benji and Rokman have unmatched chemistry. "I remember when I first met Rok in February, we were talking about our aspirations, and we thought, 'wouldn't it be so cool if a track we make gets the music video and the whole choreography treatment?" Benji said. "Here we are, baby."

Listen to "Lemonade" on NCT 127's album, *STICKER*, available on all platforms!



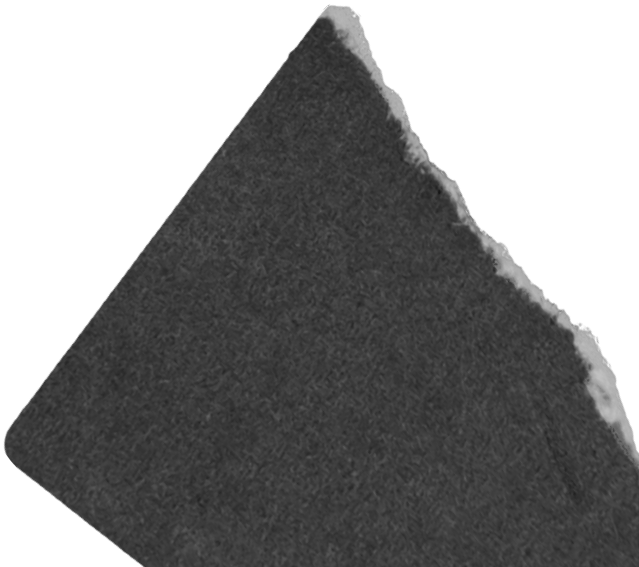
Illustration by Xana Angelo



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@GTroubleArtist

NCT 127 Share That STICKER Is A Gift For Fans



Global group NCT 127 made their long awaited comeback with their third full-length album *STICKER*, on September 17. The album comes a year and a half after the release of their second full-length album, Neo Zone. A few hours before the release, the nine members gathered for their press conference in Seoul. Select members of press around the world were invited to learn more about *STICKER*, ask a few questions, and preview the much anticipated music video.

Taeil, Taeyong, Johnny, Doyoung, Yuta, Jaehyun, Jungwoo, Mark and Haechan walked in dressed in slim fit suits. Matching their dark navy outfits with ties of the same color, the boys flaunted a polished style as they greeted the MC, Sunyoung Park.

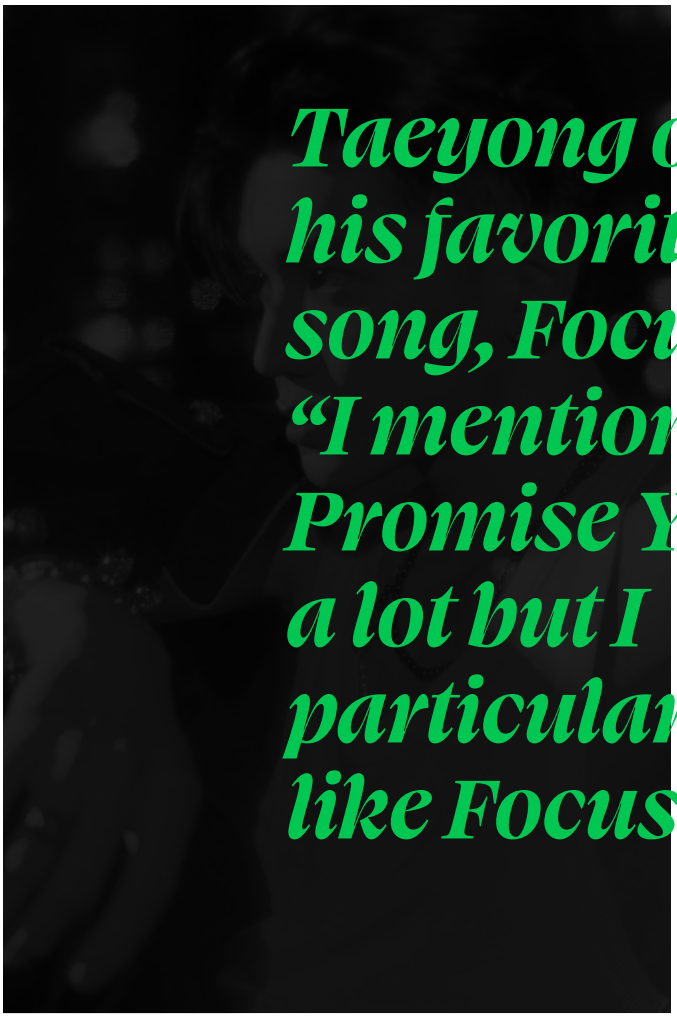
In their introductions, the members expressed their excitement about the comeback and thanked journalists for joining remotely. Noting how long it's been since their last promotions, Jaehyun mentioned the group has spent a lot of time preparing for their return. While his bandmates echoed his words, Taeil anticipated, "We are back, better than ever."

HITS THAT STICK

The press conference opened up with previews of four of their B-side tracks "Lemonade," "Focus," "Bring the Noize," and "Promise You." Introducing "Lemonade," Johnny described it as a track that's more powerful than the title song, a musical embodiment of the saying "when life gives you lemons, make lemonade." The song expresses that when life gets rough one should make the most out of it. Following "Lemonade" was "Focus," a love story set in the ocean. An R&B groovy track, it expresses the feeling of "falling deeply into each other's eyes as going underwater. The deeper you fall in love, the greater your love becomes," Yuta shared.

Produced by Hitchhiker, "Bring the Noize," is the track that gives off the most "neo" vibe, as leader Taeyong expressed, hoping fans enjoy the song as much as the members do. "'Promise You' is a mid tempo pop track with lyrics that speak on the inner heart one has to meet a loved one again," Doyoung described. The song reflects the feelings of the members for their fans, NCTzens. With expressively emotional lyrics, the members await until the moment they're reunited with their fans.

Images courtesy of SM Entertainment

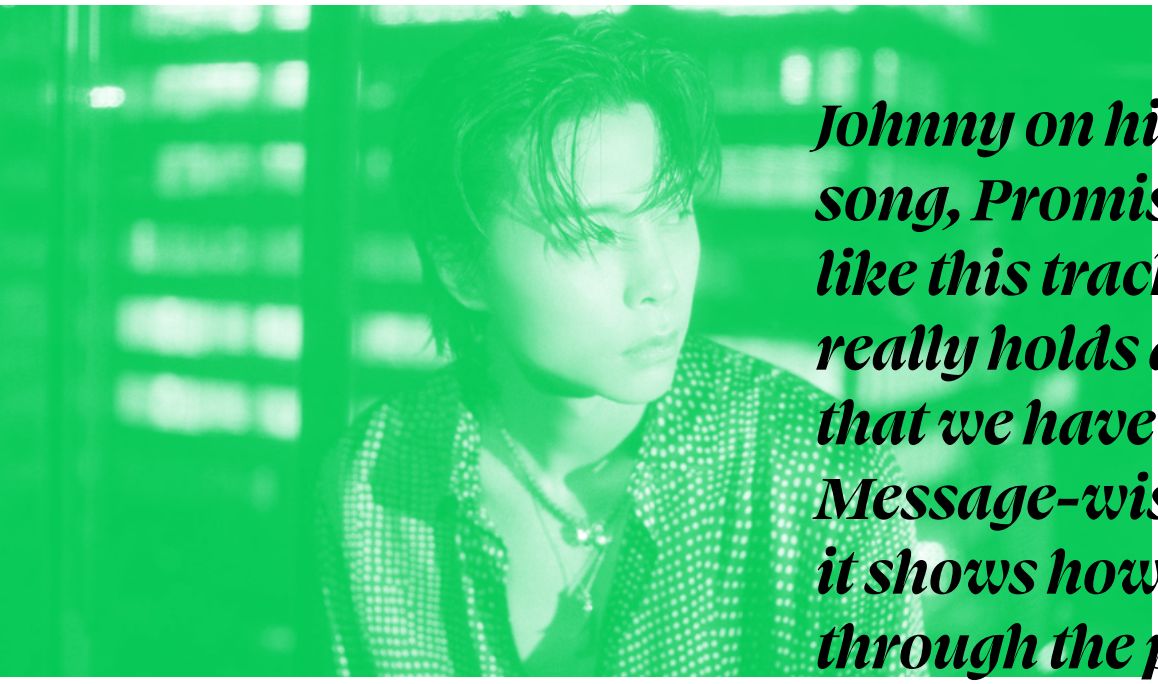


STICKING TO THE NEO-VISION

The third full-length album, consists of 11 songs, including the title track "Sticker." The track shows off the artist's growth since their last comeback, illustrating the neo-sound NCT 127 has perfectly cultivated for themselves.

When asked what the meaning behind title track "Sticker" is, Taeyong said that at first listen the members originally thought the song would be similar to their brighter track, "Touch." However, as soon as that flute started playing they realized the song was meant for them. "Yoo Young Jin also gave me the chance to participate in the rap making to make it a bit more NCT 127's color, so Mark and I worked on that." Working alongside Yoo Young Jin, Mark mentioned him and Taeyong discussed wanting to show off NCT 127's colors—and hope fans will like it too.

"I know a lot of people liked our title track 'Kick It' from our second full-length, so we were a bit worried whether or not we'd be able to bring



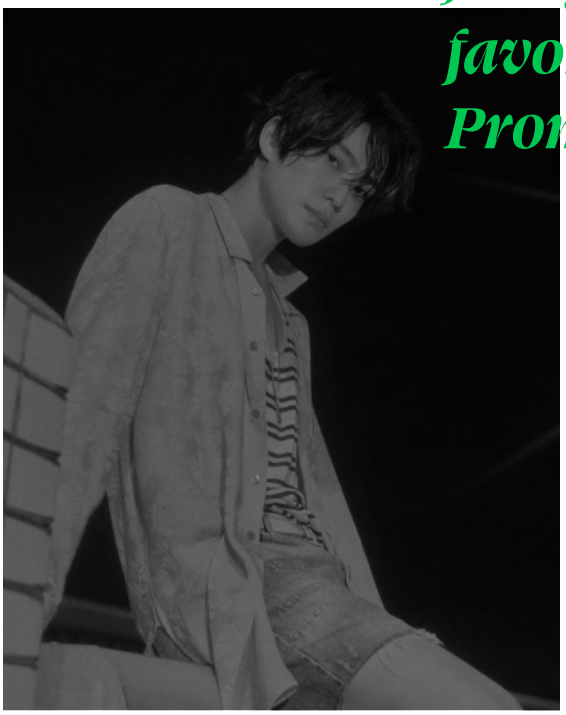
Johnny on his favorite song, Promise You - "I like this track because it really holds a message that we have for our fans. Message-wise as well it shows how we've felt through the past year and a half so it's one that's dear to me."

something even better and show an even greater performance," added Taeyong. "But in the midst of all that, is where we found 'Sticker.' We've worked hard to show how much we've grown, and we've all come together to find a track that really shows our colors well."

Taeil on his favorite song, The Rainy Night – "This track is quite different from the other tracks in the album and I feel like it has a very attractive charm to it, so I hope you guys like it."



Jaehyun's favorite song is Promise You



"We were worried when filming because there was actually a fire! And the staff said this was going to be a good sign, so yes, we're really excited," expressed Taeyong when asked about the "Sticker" music video.

Adding a signature neo-twist to a Western-style movie, the music video opens with an Old West showdown between Taeyong and Jaehyun, dressed in black leather outfits with red and yellow flame designs. A canvas of visual and special effects, the focus is on the futuristic atmosphere and the members' synchronized dance sequence.

NCT 127 STICK WITH NCTZEN

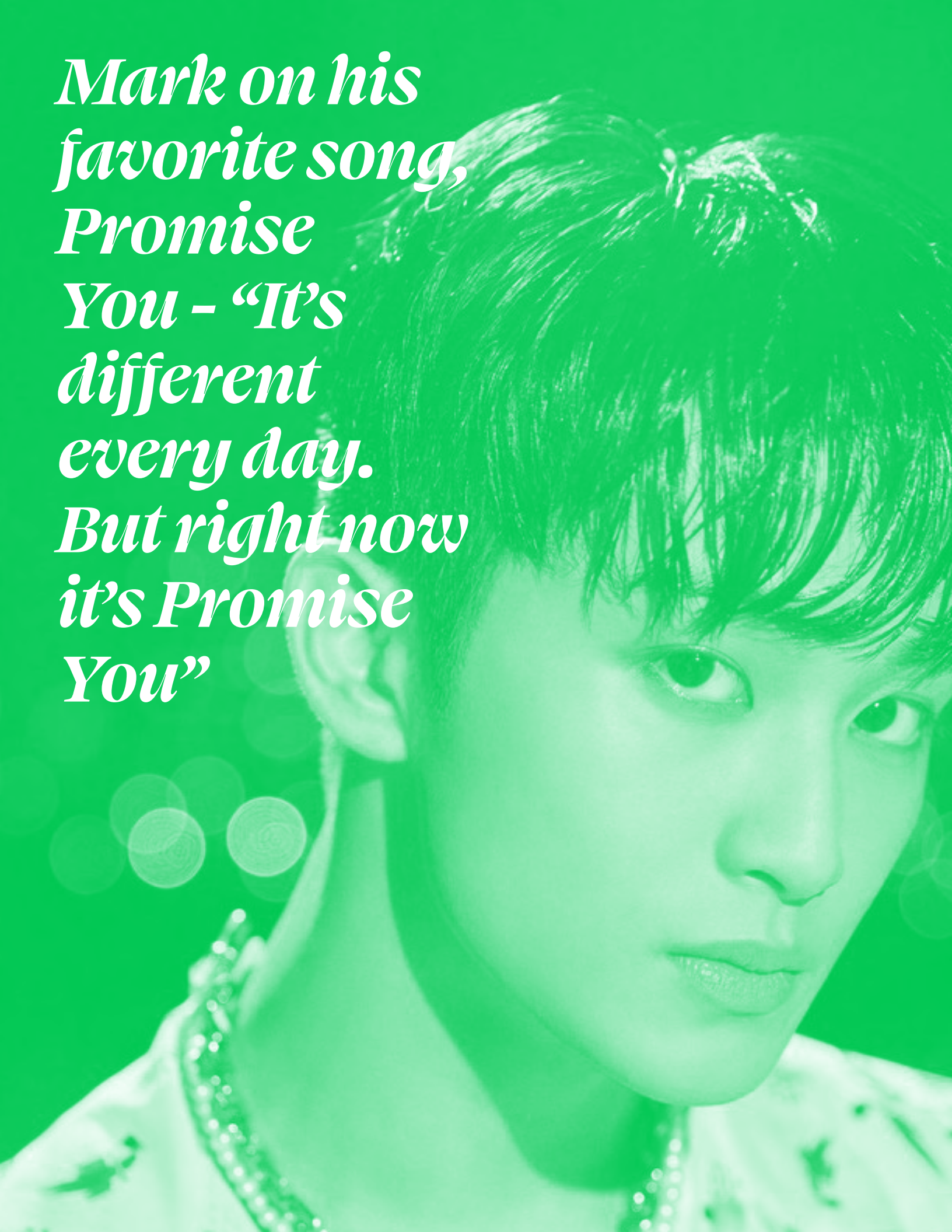
If there is one thing distinct to NCT 127's brand, it is the experimental nature of their music. The group constantly releases music that shows off their variety of skills as unique. In a sweet turn of events, Doyoung thanked fans, sharing that a lot of what went into the album was based on what they thought fans would enjoy. NCT 127 tried out something new to show off new colors to fans.

Although the press conference was for their new album, NCT 127 shared the spotlight with fans. When asked about what mentality the members would like to keep even after five years, Jaehyun opened up, saying, "I think without everyone around us that's been helping, and all our fans as well. It would've been difficult for us to become who we are today, and really grow into the individuals we are."

During the pre-order period for *STICKER*, NCT 127 sold over 2.12 million copies of their album. Taeyong's immediate response was to thank fans. "This is all possible because our fans have been constantly showing us support. We were really nervous as said in the beginning, but we're excited and we're going to work hard to continue becoming even better. So thank you!"

In his farewell, Doyoung took another second to share his feelings and dedicate the album to NCTzen. He said, "We're making a comeback after a year and a half. We hope this moment and this album becomes a gift to fans. One that makes them look back later on and realize this was one of the best from NCT 127."

Mark on his favorite song, Promise You - "It's different every day. But right now it's Promise You"



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