



## MUSIC

# TWICE is determined to keep rising — but they'll never stop having fun

The K-pop sensations and TODAY's latest cover stars — photographed by Michelle Watt — open up about self-care, sisterhood, and their new project, “With YOU-th.”

Feb. 23, 2024, 7:10 AM CST / Source: **TODAY**

By Jae-Ha Kim

**TWO WEEKS BEFORE SEOLLAL** — the first day of the Korean Lunar New Year — the members of the Korean pop group TWICE are seated in a conference room inside the JYP Entertainment headquarters in Seoul.

They are dressed in neutral-colored slacks and shirts, but vocalist Nayeon’s shirt features splashes of pink that match the fuzzy blanket over their laps as they cozy up together. The group is visibly a little tired — and that’s understandable: This Zoom interview, which we conduct in Korean, is happening at the end of a more than 12-hour press day. Still, throughout the conversation, the group banters easily with one another as they discuss their career, the importance of self care and “With YOU-th” — their 13th mini album (K-pop parlance for an EP), out Feb. 23.

Debuting in 2015, TWICE is part of the “third generation” of K-pop groups, which also includes acts like BTS and Blackpink. Their popularity has increased globally each year: They are the first female K-pop group to headline NFL and MLB stadiums in the United States. Their 12th mini-album, “READY TO BE,” had the biggest pure sales week for any female K-pop group in the U.S. And in a poll published by Billboard earlier this month, their latest single, “I Got You,” was selected as the week’s favorite new song by a landslide, beating out releases by Usher, Billy Joel, Don Toliver and Keith Urban. Collectively, the group's music has more than 7 billion streams worldwide.

Now, TWICE is one of the most beloved and bankable K-pop girl groups of all time, thanks to their continued growth as songwriters, phenomenal live shows and an endearing self-awareness. (In 2018, for example, when a fan showed up wearing a shirt with a much-memed photo of Nayeon with her cheeks stuffed with ice cubes, the group couldn't stop laughing.)

The group's name refers to being able to move fans twice: once with their music, and a second time with their beauty. The latter is evident when we log on Zoom to chat about it all, but what becomes more apparent throughout our conversation is their sisterhood. There's just one small problem: Getting all nine members of the group on camera at the same time.

When I mention that I can't see two of them, Jeongyeon and Mina pop into view. "We are here!" they cheerily declare, as Jihyo moves closer to rapper Dahyun. Tzuyu scooches over by Nayeon, while Chaeyoung, Momo and Sana squeeze together and make a valiant effort to get the group all into one shot. After each of the members introduce themselves, Nayeon points to Momo's Norwich terrier, who has made himself comfortable on Tzuyu's lap. She speaks on his behalf: "Hi, I'm Boo!" The sleepy pup barely looks up before quickly dozing off again.



Dahyun, Sana and Chaeyoung. **Michelle Watt for TODAY**

The last time TWICE did an interview with TODAY was in July of 2023, when the girl group performed a three-song set: “Set Me Free,” “Moonlight Sunrise” and “Alcohol-Free” as part of the summer Citi Concert Series on the TODAY Plaza.

While Nayeon tells TODAY.com that adapting their show for a smaller stage wasn’t difficult (to put it into perspective, the next day, they performed at New Jersey’s MetLife Stadium, which has a capacity of 82,500 seats), Chaeyoung remembers there were some jitters.

“It was our first time performing outdoors early in the morning in New York City with New Yorkers as our audience, so of course we were nervous,” she says. “But it was also a fun experience. When we heard

that some of our fans watched us from a distance (far from the stage), it really touched me.”

Besides the New Yorkers in attendance (and even some of the members’ parents), the crowd also included fans who had traveled from England and Australia. But that surprised no one: K-pop fans are renowned for their devotion. And ONCE — the name of TWICE’s fandom — is faithful, streaming the group’s music, proudly waving their Candybong light sticks, and following the group’s altruism by donating in their honor to causes such as the Korea Childhood Leukemia Foundation, Save the Children and the MIRAL Welfare Foundation.

Following the group’s Latin America leg of their world tour, which concluded Feb. 7, TWICE will return to the U.S. for a one-night only concert on March 16 at Las Vegas’ Allegiant Stadium.

“It might seem like we started off really big, but we did a lot of small stage performances when we started out,” Momo says. “It was only last year that we did our first stadium concert. So all of this has been nerve-wracking for us.”



Momo. Michelle Watt for TODAY

Because of their popularity and the strong demand for tickets to their shows, the members of TWICE are well aware that no matter where they play, there will be fans who won't be able to attend — especially those living in countries who aren't included on their itinerary.

“With every tour, we really try to visit as many places as possible,” says Sana. “That’s why we went to Europe for the first time last year, and that’s why we are doing another concert in Las Vegas this year.”

Mina adds, “We will be the first K-pop girl group to perform at Nissan Stadium (in Japan) this year, too.”

Nodding, Sana promises that the group listens to what ONCE wants.

“We always try to visit more countries with each tour,” she says. “If there are places that we haven’t visited yet but you want us to come there, please let us know. We will talk to the management and we’ll (try to) make it happen!”

## **The “Secret Sauce”**

**BEFORE THEY BECAME TWICE**, the nine members were teenage trainees at JYP Entertainment, one of South Korea’s four largest entertainment agencies. As youngsters, Jeongyeon and Jihyo represented two sides of the training process. The former initially failed a JYP audition, while the latter entered the trainee program as an eight-year-old elementary school student.

All members of TWICE’s lineup competed in a televised casting on the Korean reality series “Sixteen,” where 16 teenagers vied to be selected for a seven-person girl group that J.Y. Park (the founder of JYPE) wanted to create. Park ultimately decided to expand the lineup to nine members, adding in viewer favorite Tzuyu as well as Momo, who had originally been eliminated. A few months after they were selected, TWICE made their official debut in October 2015 with their EP “The

Story Begins.” They set a YouTube record with their music video for “Like Ooh-Ahh,” which became the first K-pop debut track to reach 100 million views.



Jeongyeon and Jihyo. **Michelle Watt for TODAY**

Now in their ninth year with all the original members — who range in ages 24 to 28 — the lineup includes five idols from South Korea (Chaeyoung, Dahyun, Jeongyeon, Jihyo, Nayeon), three from Japan (Mina, Momo, Sana) and one from Taiwan (Tzuyu). While they have



matured as women and artists, they haven't lost the infectiously catchy enthusiasm for their music that got them dubbed as the Nation's Girl Group in their homeland. (The title was previously bestowed on another nine-member Korean girl group, Girls' Generation, whose 2009 single "Gee" was ranked as the No. 1 greatest K-pop song ever by Rolling Stone.)

"I'm so grateful for the diversity in our group," Nayeon says. "If it wasn't for TWICE, I don't think I would've had the opportunity to observe other cultures so closely or have developed as much of an interest in them. Because of the exposure that we got to other cultures so early on, I think that enabled us to communicate with ONCE better when we meet global fans. The communication is deeper because of our understanding of other cultures."

"TWICE has discussed how early in their careers, they performed songs assigned to them, only gradually gaining the opportunity to participate as songwriters as they settled into their careers," says Hye Jin Lee, a professor at the University of Southern California who teaches a class on Korean pop culture. "JYP's willingness to grant them more creative control likely played a pivotal role in their decision to renew their contracts (in 2022). It will be interesting to see how TWICE continues to grow and evolve as the members release more solo albums and deepen their involvement in songwriting and the creative process."

Over the years, every member of TWICE has worked on songs as a lyricist or composer, with Dahyun, Jihyo and Chaeyoung being especially prolific.

Hyolyn, a member of the group Sistar19, has said that her previous record label discouraged her group from writing their own lyrics, saying her songwriting wasn't marketable. But TWICE collectively says that JYP has encouraged them to tap into their artistry.

On "With YOU-th," Chaeyoung, Jeongyeon and Dahyun each wrote the lyrics for "Rush," "Bloom" and "You Get Me," respectively. Dahyun says that her contribution is a continuation of the "I Got You" story arc, which reflects on how the members rely on each other to get through hardships. But regardless of who gets songwriting credits, Dahyun insists that "all of us contributed to this album, whether it was deciding on the costumes or the music videos and other concepts for the album. It was all of us."



Dahyun, Jihyo and Chaeyoung. **Michelle Watt for TODAY**

Songwriter and producer Ellis Miah — who has worked with Miley Cyrus, BTS and Big Freedia — has been a long-time supporter of TWICE and believes their success is due in part to the breadth of emotions they convey in their songs.

“On the surface, it’s easy to be drawn to the uptempo bangers — the songs that win over a crowd and get you moving, like ‘I Can’t Stop Me,’” he says. “But I love their vulnerable songs like ‘Be as ONE’ or ‘SAY YES’ just as much. Any time an artist can have a hand in the writing creates the opportunity for them to connect with the music on another level. This may very well be a part of TWICE’s secret sauce.”

This duality is reflected in “New New,” which hints at the relatively carefree style from their earlier years, but with the perspective of wiser women who have grown as artists.

“The mood of the song is very bright and cheerful, which is close to what we used to sing when we first had our debut,” Jeongyeon says. “The fact that we are singing something of a similar mood from back then but with our more mature voices made us feel very refreshed. We were able to express feelings in a new way. ‘New New’ is one of my favorite songs from the album.”

Indeed, TWICE can *aegyo* — or act cutely — with the best of them, but their songs and on-stage performances have taken on a stronger, more powerful stance. When they harmonize, their lush vocals blend so well together that it’s less about who is singing which part and more about the overall result.

USC’s Professor Lee agrees. “This transformation aligns with the natural progression of a girl group as its members mature — departing from the cutesy performances and themes of waiting for male initiation that characterized the songs earlier in their career. TWICE has effectively demonstrated that this formula can bring popularity and longevity to a girl group, underscored by the remarkable fact that all the members have stayed with the group, choosing to renew their contracts with the company where they began their careers — a rarity with girl groups.”



Tzuyu, Sana and Momo. **Michelle Watt for TODAY**

Having the freedom to mold their sound themselves has given them the artistic control that's so important to them. As they've matured, TWICE's lyrics have become more self-assured and empowered, too, becoming increasingly relevant to its expanding female fan base, and leaving room for solo projects. Two of the members have already released their own mini-albums. Nayeon's "Im Nayeon" came out in 2022, while Jihyo's "Zone" followed last year.

“The upside of doing a solo album is there was an opportunity for growth,” Jihyo says. “I got to know myself much better as an individual. However, I also felt the pressure of working alone when I’m so used to collaborating with eight other members. It was kind of nerve-wracking.”

Nayeon nods, adding, “I think that’s when I started to really think about myself and what I like as an individual. I started to think about which things are meant for us as a group and separately as individuals.”

When I ask which member will be the next to release a solo album, they all smile but decline to answer. “It’s a secret for now,” Jihyo says.

## **Setting an Example**

**EXTREME ONLINE BULLYING IS** an unfortunate part of a Korean celebrity’s life. And female idols face all the harassment that male idols do and more — misogyny, sexism and rigid beauty standards. So when an idol takes a break from her activities and tells her fans that she needs to tend to her mental health, what kind of message is she sending her fans? In TWICE’s case, it was one that inspired gratitude. Mina took a mental health break in 2019. Jeongyeon followed suit in 2020 and 2021. While idols from earlier eras may have been concerned that fans would react negatively, TWICE’s fandom rallied to support them.

“It meant the world to me when the girls addressed why they were taking a break,” says Tara, a devoted Korean American fan who was in high school at the time. “My parents didn’t take my depression seriously and told me to eat something delicious and get more sleep. I felt very isolated and alone. But seeing idols like Mina telling us that they need rest, too, made me feel like I was seen.”



Mina. Michelle Watt for TODAY

According to mental health experts, this kind of transparency between idols and their fans is extremely meaningful. Tara, who asked to remain anonymous, says she feels that fans of Asian heritage

especially need to hear their idols speak out about mental health issues because they don't always get the support they need at home. Studies have found that Asian Americans are the least likely of any ethnic group to seek professional help for their mental well being.

Joy Lieberthal Rho, a Korean American LCSW counselor at The Juilliard School, says that idols expressing when they're too tired to work or are facing anxiety issues can be a positive gateway for fans to address their own mental health.

“They may be idols, but they are sentient beings who need the same basic things all humans need,” Lieberthal Rho says. “They may not be able to deal with the negativity better, but they may have more strength and tolerance to endure if allowed to not be subjected to negativity 24/7 for seven, 10, 15 years straight.”

For TWICE, they say their attention to self-care was something that evolved after years together as a group, and thanks to their fans' support.

“It was our recognition that at the end of the day, this is our job,” says Jihyo. “It's what we do for a living. But I know that I cannot live the rest of my life only as Jihyo from TWICE, so I had to learn how to take care of myself mentally and physically ... and when to stop when I need to. I think my health and my good energy is shown very frankly



to our fans. Our fans see that. So taking care of myself is part of my job, too.”

Chaeyoung adds, “We talked a lot amongst ourselves and we also talked with our management. All of that helped us individually and as a group to cope with whatever is going on.”





Jeongyeon, Nayeon and Mina. **Michelle Watt for TODAY**

## Sister, Sister

**AS THIS INTERVIEW DRAWS** to a close, Boo has moved over to rest on Chaeyoung and Momo's laps. When I ask the members to each talk a bit about what they admire about each other, the pup is awakened by their laughter. "This might take a while!" they say. For the sake of brevity, they decide that it would be best for them to each assess the member sitting to their direct right.

"I admire Momo because she makes everyone feel so comfortable around her," Sana says. "I've never seen any person who feels uncomfortable in her presence."

Momo adds, "What I admire about Chaeyoung is that whenever none of us really have an answer, she's always able to respond. She's very expressive and good at giving reactions to everything."

Of Nayeon, Chaeyoung offers, "She's great at giving recommendations and advice, whether it be for things or a place. Nayeon is really keen on

sharing and recommending her experience. Her advice has always proven to be very helpful, so I really trust her taste.”

Meanwhile, Nayeon — the eldest of the group — gives her opinion on the *maknae* (or youngest member) Tzuyu: “She is always trying to better herself and improve. She makes so much effort and she’s able to execute whatever decisions she makes.”

Looking over at Dahyun, Tzuyu says, “She’s very calm and quiet, which are similar traits as mine. That’s why I think we get along so well. We take one-day classes together. She’s also really good at whatever she does, and she has great passion for it. She always tries to give her best for her fans.”

“What I love about Jihyo is that she’s always the first one to act on something,” Dahyun says. “She’s also very casual and is very cute. Jihyo is also great at taking care of all of our members. She looks after us.”



Nayeon and Tzuyu. **Michelle Watt** for TODAY

Smiling warmly, Jihyo says, “What I love about Mina is that most of the time she’s so quiet and womanly. And I want to kind of learn from her in that respect, but it’s not working so well for me.” As the other members giggle, she adds, “I can’t really be the same way. She is quiet and calm most of the time, but when we play sexy music during our concerts, she completely turns 180 degrees and she is *out there*. She can do it all and I really love that about her.”

Mina says, “Jeongyeon takes great interest in the people around her. She is able to take care of them really, really well. Not just the members, but our staff and anyone else who is there. She’s always looking after everyone.”

And finally, Jeongyeon notes that in her lifetime, she has “never met anybody who is more empathetic than Sana. She is the queen of empathy. Whenever something great happens to other people, she’s the first one to laugh with them. Whenever something sad happens, she’s the first one to cry with them. I feel that sometimes I worry that she might get tired or emotionally drained, but at the same time, I wish I could be the same way.”

Three days before the Feb. 23 release of “With YOU-th,” TWICE arrives in New York for a press tour, kicking off with their TODAY cover photo shoot. Despite the 14-hour time difference between Seoul and NYC, the members are endearingly effervescent; when Dahyun passes by a table of sweets, she squeals “Cookies!” There is also an unmistakable hint of mischief: When Beyoncé’s song “Yoncé” plays over the loudspeaker, Jeongyeon busts into some dance moves, reciting nearly every lyric to herself. And though the members are game to do whatever our photographer and crew asks of them — accepting balloons tossed at them, balancing in heels against iridescent inflatable balls — they can’t help but collapse into whispers and giggles with one another between takes.

The balloons work as a metaphor for where TWICE is now: at the top of their field, but always working to achieve more and rise higher — together.

“We always want to challenge ourselves,” says Nayeon. “But it’s also important that we have fun doing so.”



## ***PRODUCTION CREDITS***

**Photographer:** Michelle Watt

**Photo Assistants:** Daniel Cochran, Leanna Siupinys

**Photo Intern:** Anna Henderson

**Set Designer:** Tim Ferro

**Retouching:** Feather Creative

Set Designer assistant: Reece Koetter

Stylists: Soyul Oh, Sohyun Lee, Bokyung Kim

Hair: Dasom Kim, Yebeen Hwang

Makeup: Jungyo Won, Dasom Choi

**Head of TODAY Digital:** Ashley Codianni

**Editorial Director:** Arianna Davis

**Art Director / Photo Editor:** Tyler Essary

**Art Director:** Jennifer Prandato

**Talent Booker:** Christina Manna

**Production Manager:** Brittany Howard

**Videographers:** Luke Piccoli, Mike Kanesmith

**Social:** Melissa Radzimski, Lexy White

---

## ***STYLE CREDITS***

### **NAYEON:**

Dress: Acne Studio

Shoes: Shutz



**JEONGYEON:**

Shirt: Gauchere

**MOMO:**

Dress: Third form

Shoes: bymina

**SANA:**

Dress (both two pieces): Third form

Shoes: SMFK

**JIHYO:**

Dress: Baobab

**MINA:**

Dress: Baobab

Shoes: Giuseppe Zanotti

**DAHYUN:**

Dress: Mugler

Shoes: Shutz

## **CHAEYOUNG:**

Dress: Ferragamo

Shoes: Shutz

## **TZUYU:**

Dress: Courreges

## **Jae-Ha Kim**

Jae-Ha Kim is a columnist for the Chicago Tribune news syndicate. Born in Seoul, Kim specializes in covering Korean entertainment for outlets such as TODAY.com, Rolling Stone, K-Culture with Jae-Ha Kim, NPR, Teen Vogue, and many more. An in-demand voice on Korean culture, Kim has been featured in publications like the New York Times, Associated Press, MTV, Korea Times, and South China Morning Post. Previously, she was a week-long guest on the TODAY SHOW to talk about Friends. You may find her on Instagram and X.