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EXCLUSIVE

TZUYU IS READY FOR HER SOLO MOMENT

The youngest member of the successful K-pop group TWICE talks about her first mini-album, *aboutTJU*

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JYP ENTERTAINMENT*

On a late-summer evening in Seoul, TWICE's youngest member, Tzuyu, appears on screen for a Zoom interview. She is at her management company, JYP Entertainment, dressed in a crisp dalmatian-themed white T-shirt and has her shoulder-length blonde hair styled in the Gen Z-favored middle part. Tzuyu cheerfully smiles and waves hello before settling in to discuss her debut solo mini album *aboutTZU*, out today.

In a separate interview with the entire group at the beginning of this year, Tzuyu was one of nine voices talking about their nearly year-and-a-half-long *Ready to Be* world tour and the release of their album *With YOU-th*. When I asked them which member would be the next to release a solo album — Nayeon and Jihyo had already released theirs in 2022 and 2023, respectively — Tzuyu was poker-faced, giving nothing away.

On this day, the sole Taiwanese member of the Korean girl group is a little shy. But she is eager to chat about the creative process of putting together her six-track mini album, how her songwriting requires her to think in three different languages (Korean, Chinese, English), and going viral for her archery skills (more on that later).

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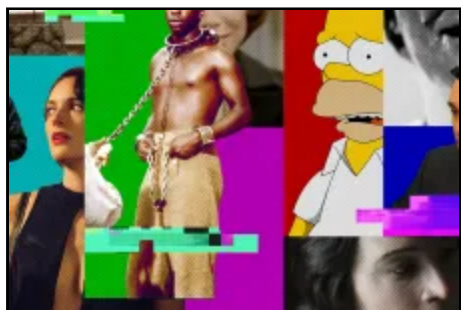
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After Nayeon's second solo mini album was released in June, the way was clear for Tzuyu. "I knew for a few months that I would be next," she tells *Rolling Stone* in Korean. "I had told JYP that I wanted to release my album and they thankfully agreed. We don't really have a system as to which one of us gets to do it next. But as with everything in TWICE, if one of us has the desire, and if we bring it up to the company first, then that's how it's decided. It's very fair."

It wouldn't have been surprising if Tzuyu had decided to take a break rather than record new music near the tail end of a grueling world tour. But some time between TWICE's Allegiant Stadium show in Las Vegas in March, and their series of concerts in Japan this past July, Tzuyu —

born Chou Tzu-yu in Tainan, Taiwan — was already preparing to bring her vision to life.

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Though it could have been daunting to launch a solo career, knowing that her individual work would inevitably be compared to the chart-topping songs recorded within the group that made her famous, Tzuyu says that didn't deter her. Instead, she viewed this as an opportunity to showcase her artistic growth, rather than making it a contest.

“Of course I would be very thankful if people paid attention to my album and it ranked somewhere on the charts,” Tzuyu, 25, says. “But rather than breaking any records, I want to focus on how hard I worked on it. My goal is to give back my love to my fans. That is the important part for me.”

Having listened to an early watermarked version of *aboutTZU*, I tell Tzuyu that the songs tell a cohesive story, starting with the effervescent “Run Away” and ending with “Fly,” a contemplative song she co-wrote. The EP includes collaborations with BTOB's Peniel on the all-English “Heartbreak in Heaven” and with pH-1 on “Lazy Baby.” As each track progresses, the listener could extrapolate that the songs are about romantic love and loss. But they also convey a take-charge sense of being proactive about one's life, whether one is “Losing Sleep” or finding that elusive element in “One Love.”

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“I really did want to express my diverse sides with this album,” Tzuyu says. “I heard the music to ‘Fly,’ and really liked it. So for that song, I heard the music first and then wrote the lyrics to fit it.”



TWICE (from left): Tzuyu, Mina, Nayeon, Dahyun, Jeongyeon, Jihyo, Sana, Chaeyoung, Momo

Tzuyu is one of four TWICE members born outside Korea (Mina, Momo, and Sana are Japanese). One of the advantages of being multilingual is that she can communicate with more fans without a go-between. That ability, however, can also sometimes hinder her songwriting process, when too many languages are jumbled in her head.

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“When I start the general ideation process, I tend to think in Chinese,” Tzuyu shares. “Then when I look at the specific lyrics, I tend to think in Korean. For English, I tend to think about which words would be the most harmonious and natural. English is very hard, but some lyrics just tend to fall naturally in English. I used to take English lessons, but I stopped for a few months while preparing my album. But I will work to be better at it.”

As for the album’s lead track, “Run Away,” Tzuyu says she knew it was right for her the first time she heard it.

“I love Ava Max and wanted to do a song like her style of music,” she says. “When I heard ‘Run Away,’ I wondered to myself, ‘Would it suit me?’ But I also thought that I would regret it if I didn’t sing it.”

Pausing, she adds, “I specifically curated the songs in the order they’re in, so on first listen, I hope fans listen to it that way [to hear the full story]. They don’t have to, but that’s my hope. And if they like it enough to listen to it a second or third or more times, it’s up to them to listen to it any way they like.”

Tzuyu’s artistic vision is just one reason why JYP’s founder and producer, J.Y. Park, encouraged her to release *about:TZU*.

“As the youngest of the group, we believe she has now grown and matured into a competent artist to express her artistry on stage,” Park says in an email to *Rolling Stone*. “Of course [we have seen growth in Tzuyu’s] singing and dancing, but it’s more about her being capable of fully expressing herself.”

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As an artist, Tzuyu says that she strives to constantly learn and improve. She listens to recommendations from fans, delves into different genres, and checks out TikTok challenges. Besides her admiration for Ava Max, she’s a fan of Taylor Swift and covered her hit “ME!” in 2021.

This interview was conducted shortly after the Paris Olympics concluded last month. As expected, the South Korean women's team won its tenth consecutive Olympic gold medal in archery. During that time, old video clips of Tzuyu participating in archery competitions on *Idol Star Athletics Championships (ISAC)* went viral, leading some non-Korean viewers to believe the K-pop star was an Olympian. Tzuyu gives a nod to this in her video pre-release trailer for *aboutTZU*.

TZUYU "aboutTZU" Opening Trailer



“Archery isn’t a sport that I grew up with or do every day,” she says, smiling. “When I heard that I was gonna participate in *ISAC*, I just practiced a little bit beforehand. That was it. I was just lucky to have gotten those really good scores.”

Almost apologetically, she self-deprecatingly adds, “But I can’t swim... and I haven’t had time to practice for my driver’s license this year as I had hoped.”

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Though she's enjoying TWICE's success, she made sacrifices to get to this stage. Tzuyu moved away from home as a young teen to live and train in Seoul as a K-pop trainee. There was no guarantee then that she would become an integral member of one of the most famous K-pop groups. I ask her, if you could go back and talk to your 13-year-old self, what would you tell that little girl?

"I know that I'm a person who thinks a lot and has always had a lot of worries," Tzuyu says. "So if I were to meet trainee Tzuyu, I would tell her not to be fearful, try a lot of challenges, and don't box myself in. That's what I would want her to know. I think when people look at me, they all have different perceptions of who I am. One reason I hope they listen to my album is that I want them to really experience my diverse inner emotions and get a better understanding."

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