

MUSIC



DBSK – When I was 14 years old, I turned on the family computer to watch “Last Angel,” the newest single from one of my favorite Japanese artists, Koda Kumi. Despite the low-res pixelation of the music video, five boys got my attention on the second chorus and bridge. I thought “*Who were those guys? They sing and dance well. That blonde one is really pretty too!*”

Thus, I discovered the Korean group, Dong Bang Shin Ki (DBSK for short). Internationally, the group is known as TVXQ, but in Korean their name was a self-fulfilling prophecy when translated into English - Rising Gods of the East. And they did rise.

Originally a five-member group consisting of Kim Jaejoong, Jung Yunho, Park Yoochun, Kim Junsu and Shim Changmin, the group’s musical integrity stood the test of time following their debut in 2003 and it still holds up two decades later.

Their vocal and dance abilities were unparalleled during the second generation of K-Pop. What made them so special was that each member was capable of being a main vocalist, regardless of whether they were positioned as a main rapper or lead dancer. As they were known as an acapella-dance group, the harmonization of R&B-like favorites such as

“Million Men” or up-tempo bops like “Purple Line” was proof that they knew how to pour emotion into each lyric and dance move.

In the summer of 2008, during the lazy days of my uneventful school holidays, I found myself searching for what crumbs of information I could find on them. Before personalized “for you” recommendations dominated social media, forums such as DBSKnights and the fan-subbing group Gods of the East in the early days of Dailymotion and YouTube were the saving grace for me to learn more about DBSK through translated episodes of shows like X-Man and Banjun Drama.

And not gonna lie – it worked on me.

By the end of that summer, I designated myself as a full-blown *Cassiopeia*, the official fandom name, based on the five-star constellation which represented each member of the group. My admiration for DBSK ignited a determination within me to discover more. I threw myself headfirst into a rabbit hole where I found myself consumed by the “Hal-lyu Wave” – the export of South Korea’s soft power through cinema, fashion and music.

In the early 2000s, South Korea was still recovering from a nationwide crisis of economic depression that began the previous

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decade. The Hallyu Wave became a way to accelerate economic recovery. So, after DBSK debuted in December 2003 with their first single, “Hug,” the group slowly became an influential and versatile powerhouse for SM Entertainment, one of South Korea’s top four entertainment companies.

Over time, their achievements, talents and contributions to music catapulted their status and made me feel the immense influence they had over my generation. Remember *Fast and Furious 4*? Their song, “Rising Sun,” was played in the movie. Guinness World Records? They had the world’s largest fan club with over 800,000 official members in 2008.

DBSK’s influence wasn’t limited to Korea, either. They were the first Korean group to popularize K-Pop, smash records and lead the Hallyu Wave in the second generation. In Japan, they were the first Korean group to hold a two day-concert at the prestigious Tokyo Dome, and they also won MTV Video Music Awards for Best Buzz and Collaboration Video in 2007 and 2008 for their songs, “O-Jung.Ban.Hap” and “Last Angel.” DBSK’s hard work allowed their successors to enter the Japanese market.

I remember buying their Japanese EP, *SUMMER: Summer Dream* two years after its release

with the pocket money I saved up and getting a photocard. Puzzled, I scoured the internet and learned that this was something new. DBSK were the first K-Pop artists to do this in 2007, but it’s not something acknowledged today.

There was also something so exciting about the release of “Mirotic” in 2008 and watching the music video for the very first time. Before I went to school that day, I screamed after listening to the song and saw how good the members looked. Dare I say, it was life-changing for me.

It’s sexy, it’s catchy, the choreography is memorable, and Changmin’s high note is the iconic climax of “Mirotic.” The album was one of the bestselling of the year, exceeding over 500,000 copies and winning Album of the Year. *Mirotic* cemented the group as one of the top second-generation idols of K-pop. On December 31, 2009, tvN ENEWS Black-box revealed the top earners that year in Korea with DBSK ranking 1st, generating revenue of \$109M USD.

Even now, in my 30s, I feel the impact DBSK has had on my life. I used their song “Darkness Eyes” for my GCSE Dance exam, I met friends within the fandom on Facebook and discovered “shipping” through fanfiction



sites like Winglin, which was dominated by the popular pairing of Yunjae, consisting of members Yunho and Jaejoong.

Their influence is still reflected in K-Pop today. Idols such as Moonbyul of the girl group, MAMAMOO did a cover of “Rising Sun” during MAMAMOO’s 2019 concert tour, and boy group TXT performed “Mirotic” at the KBS Song Festival in 2021. DBSK also impacted the business of K-Pop. If it wasn’t for Jaejoong, Yoochun and Junsu filing and winning their lawsuit against SM for the 13-year slave contract the company imposed on them, future idols wouldn’t have been able to advocate for their own needs and wants.

This December is DBSK’s 20th anniversary, and I can’t help but go down memory lane. Whilst **Jaejoong has hinted at a 20th anniversary album on his cooking show, DBSK has recently announced their next album will be released on the day of their debut** and I can’t help but wonder if a surprise is in store, or even a reunion.

But most importantly, I hope their legacy continues to live on and that fans – now and in the future – don’t forget the path DBSK paved for K-Pop.

– NYASHA OLIVER



PLAYLIST

“TRI-ANGLE,” by DBSK

“Keep Your Head Down,” by DBSK

“Dangerous Mind,” by DBSK

“Get Me Some,” by DBSK

“Our Game,” by DBSK

“The Way U Are,” by DBSK

“Million Men,” by DBSK

“Hey! Girl,” by DBSK

“Doushite Kimi wo Suki ni Natte Shimattandarou?,” by DBSK

“SHE,” by DBSK

“Bolero,” by DBSK

“Love In The Ice,” by DBSK

“Destiny,” by DBSK

“Phantom,” by DBSK

“Rising Sun,” by DBSK

“O-Jung.Ban.Hap,” by DBSK

“Purple Line,” by DBSK

“MIROTIC,” by DBSK

“Balloons,” by DBSK

“HUG,” by DBSK

LISTEN ON SPOTIFY