SHINee's COLOR

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How SHINee Found Their True Colors

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SHINee's COLOR

Designed by Hollie Puterbaugh

2025

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01

SHINee's BACK!



SHINee's
back
SHINee's
back
SHINee's back
Back back back
back
From now, all stop,
whomever it is
No one can leave this site
Don't get nervous in this obvious
scene
I'm already free in the secret room

I won't miss even a single trembling breath of yours
The jewel of the heart that I've secretly been aiming for
I'm already aware of your anxious eyes
I've found you on the dragon's board, I'm freeze

You, with an innocent face
You shake my heart and look for a chance
Two answers (two answers)
Explode like a firework in a long night, baby

Oh I'm curious yeah
You smile from the picture at the moment, why
Oh I'm so curious yeah
I'm so curious yeah

For over a hundred times
I think about you and forget about
you
The question that fills up
my head
What is it that you
want

This moment
That flows
into my
heart
with-
out a
so
u

Onew | Minho | Jonghyun | Key | Taemin

K-pop's princes reigned supreme across the guts of a decade – a tenure largely unheard of in an industry with sky-high expectations, and what were once beefy contracts that led to break-ups and burnout. When the group first debuted in 2008, the K-pop landscape was very different – more niche, but gaining international

ONEW

JONGHYUN

MINHO

KEY

TAEMIN

set the scene to come with their debut, R&B inflected "Replay", kickstarting a legacy of critically-acclaimed albums, brand deals, reality shows, and two films about the group. In 2018, South Korea's compulsory military service put Onew, Key, and Minho out of action, and the group's mammoth activity was put on ice.

Minho surprised the group at Taemin's solo artist showcase right after being discharged from his mandatory military service at the end of 2020. Showing up in his uniform, it was a hilarious and heartfelt moment that saw Key groan at how embarrassing he was, but still instinctively opening his arms for a hug. For fans, it felt overwhelming, but unreal. As the group conversed in front of a joyous audience, Key, ever the Internet savant, rolled his eyes at his team's Instagram live struggles. The camaraderie fizzed.



sprung from lips and phones, but fans' brains are still very much catching up, even more so with the release of their seventh studio album, Don't Call Me.

The gears finally click in my own head when the video call connects, and the faces of SHINee pop up on the other side for our interview. They're huddled together at a table, well into what is a typical day for them. Which, as Key describes in his characteristic dry tone, includes: "Work, work, work." "And eat," Taemin adds, beaming at Key. "We always eat together." Throughout our chat, SHINee flit between their world and our own. Taemin seems determined to distract the other members, which at one point prompts Key to cover his face with a sheet of paper and ask him to calm down, making the group dissolve into giggles. Taemin looks into the camera, away from the eyes of our diligent interpreter, and dramatically mimes dance steps, with a playful smile. Minho follows suit as Onew looks on with the smile of a resigned parent. As the filial dynamic unfolds, everything falls into place. Watching SHINee come together is like picking up a conversation with an old friend: you may not have talked in years, but you can pick up from the same place you left off in without missing a beat. It's a bond unsullied by time and the vagaries of life.

SHINee is back after all.

"When we were trying to look for a title track for this comeback, we all agreed it needed to be a song that was impactful and strong, and held up the message that we're back," says Key of "Don't Call Me", the album's title track. The group started teasing the record earlier this month, dropping surreal visuals on their social media, featuring UFOs and flaming park benches.

"We felt that ('Don't Call Me') was the perfect track because it also showcases our performance. That was something we really wanted to do. SHINee is a group that always tries something new" – Minho, SHINee

"We felt that this was the perfect track because it also showcases our performance," adds Minho. "That was something we really wanted to do. SHINee is a group that always tries something new, so it fits in that vein as well."

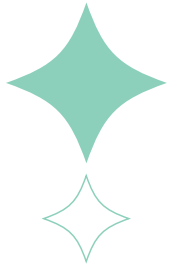
PUSH BOUNDARIES

Minho remains humble when acknowledging the quartet's drive to push boundaries, but SHINee's reputation as one of K-pop's most inventive acts is a cardinal truth. The moment their debut single "Replay" propelled the group to stardom overnight in 2008, SHINee's impact was undeniable. They exploded what K-pop should and could be, experimenting in genres from R&B to electro on "Everybody", and hybrid remixing with "Hello" – productions getting slicker with each new release. It was a blueprint for what we see today, with behemoths like BTS, EXO, and SEVENTEEN acknowledging their influence. With each new release, they remained adventurous: the high-powered "Ring Ding Dong", the pulsating rhythms of "Lucifer", the fiendish complexity of "Sherlock (Clue + Note)". The latter, an ingenious amalgamation of two B-sides, "Clue" and "Note", is a particularly effective showcase of K-pop's malleability.



02

ODD EYE



My
eyes
were
looking
for you
So I found
you
Well I know
you're there
Show me your eyes
Don't hide
You were something differ-
ent
I knew you'd be like this
That special something,
different from others
I knew you had it

Hey, I know this sounds typical
But look at me, don't be scared
I know, I know, you're on the defense
I understand, of course,
how could you believe me?
It's strange, your eyes, your pupils
Don't misunderstand, I think it's attractive
In the end,
you stole all the eyes in this place

Oh you~ My eyes on you~
My eyes on you~ Odd eyed it's you~
Show me yourself a little bit more
Don't hide it
My eyes on you~ Odd eyed it's you~

You're mysterious, full of secrets
I can't figure you out with
the things I see
It's not enough to find
out
It's like a thriller
with a twist
You're scene
stealer,
everyone
avoids
you
The
re

Onew | Minho | Jonghyun | Key | Taemin

It wasn't until 2015's Odd, however, that the group would actively start building what they now refer to as their 'colour', gaining more control and vision for what was next.

"I don't know if this is the right word, but SM (Entertainment) made us," wrote Key in an essay for Allure earlier this year. "We didn't create (SHINee). We were a produced group... It wasn't until 2015, seven years after my debut, that our staff asked for our opinions. I think that was the epiphany moment, like, 'OK, I need to make these decisions'." For the first time in their career, SHINee were confronted with the question of who they wanted to be. There was a blank canvas, with nothing to do but write their own story.

The first chapter of this new era was 2015's "View", which they collectively chose as the lead single. Simple, refined, and sensual, its deep-house production felt refreshing. In retrospect, Odd is the serendipitous result of stark, resolute clarity and implicit trust. It's what happens when a group is so absolutely sure of who they are and where they want to go that the transition from concept to reality is all but seamless, a surprising feat for an act with such distinct, headstrong personalities. At this time, they had begun striking out with their own robust solo careers, in what felt like a bid to reckon with the creative control they could harness outside of a group setting. Taemin's solo work music, still, remains heavily rooted in his pop influences, while Key's debut solo album, Face, traversed pop punk and big-room house. As a collective, they're pushing at their genre dynamics.

With Don't Call Me, we see them redefining what it means to be SHINee even more.

WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE? WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE? WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE?

Of course, it wasn't so easy as Taemin makes it sound. Key – who, with his famous dry humour, once explained how Minho annoyed the hell out of him in their shared house, with niggling TV watching and eating habits – shares that it was a constant exercise in being receptive to each other. "Individually, we all went through so many different experiences," Key explains. "And because of those individual experiences we had on our own, when we were together, we realised that the members were all helping each other. If I was lacking in something, another member would fill in that hole for me."

"Because each of us is so strong and we work so hard, I think it was easy for us to build our own identities as individuals. So, when we come together as SHINee, that magnifies even more, expressing SHINee as a group" – Taemin, SHINee

Onew, the group's taciturn, soft-spoken leader, points out the irony: "It's because we're so different that this kind of chemistry and teamwork works."

SHINee's colour, however, can't be spoken about without acknowledging the legacy of their celebrated vocalist, Jonghyun, who died by suicide in 2017. SHINee's ethos has Jonghyn's legacy at its heart, whether through his lyrics and compositions in posthumous releases like The Story of Light trilogy, or as one of the first K-pop idols to produce, write, and release his own work, and truly push for more creative control and input for artists. His tragic loss sent ripples through fans and industry alike, but it was at the tight-knit core of SHINee that it resonated the most.

"We used to go to the same studios, and meet the same staff members, but it was hard to face them," said Minho on the Radio Star talk show in 2018, one of the few times the members openly discussed Jonghyun's legacy. Admittedly, at the time, the group had reservations about continuing.



03

OUR PAGE

Can
you
feel it?
We're
connected
By our hearts
that are transpar-
ent like invisible
string
I talk to the sky and
make a promise with it
I will keep on walking no
matter how harsh the road gets
When I stand again on the road we
walked on together
There are five overlapping hands, tears and
memories
It's so clear, I don't want to forget
I can't forget

The pretty words you left
Behind become a poem, become a song
Our voices are flying
We know it'll reach you wherever you are
If a star vanishes, will everything be forgotten?
I'm holding the precious you in my arms
I want to fill the pages of this story that isn't over yet
Until the very end

I'll say that I miss you
But it won't fill up my empty heart tonight
We're facing each other, we're still the
same
We're still the boys who are
dreaming

The pretty words you
left behind
Become a poem,
become a song
Our voices
are flying
We
know
it'll
rea
c

Onew | Minho | Jonghyun | Key | Taemin

"We did it for Jonghyun, and for our fans."

Key explained, during the group's appearance on Radio Star, why they decided to hold their concert at Tokyo Dome at the start of 2018 -- two months after Jonghyun's death -- as scheduled. They left a space for him in

choreography and they let his pre-recorded vocals blast out. “Our purpose was to commemorate his memory and say a proper goodbye to him with our fans.”

When the album trilogy **The Story of Light** followed, the group wrote and dedicated the track **“Our Page”** to him.

"How nice it is to have my group members"

The shared grief also brought them closer, elucidating what really mattered. "At the time, I wanted to work as a soloist, but then I realized how nice it is to have my group members," Taemin said on the show. Outside of their own personal silos, too, there was a renewed comprehension of who SHINee were: "We used to try to show people what they would like to see. That's what we strived to do. But now, we want to do it for ourselves. We've been doing this together for a long time. We thought: 'What are we doing this for?' If we can't get through this, we thought we would split. We decided to overcome this because we didn't want that." The words resonate louder in present time, when Taemin describes Don't Call Me as being perfectly representative of SHINee's 'colour' today. It's easy to see why: the mood sampler for Don't Call Me is vibrant and campy, recalling the playfulness and dramatics of the Married to the Music days. The sound, a mix of rap, synth, funk, and pop, still can't be pinned down, but their solid harmonies dominate. Taemin attributes the genesis of their seventh album to the group's confidence in this collective identity. "In the beginning, we were a team that had been produced, but it was after we debuted that we (really) built the identity of the group, that we built our own colour and style. I think that's really important to have as an artist. That's something we want to continue to emphasise going forward."

"We built our own colour and style"

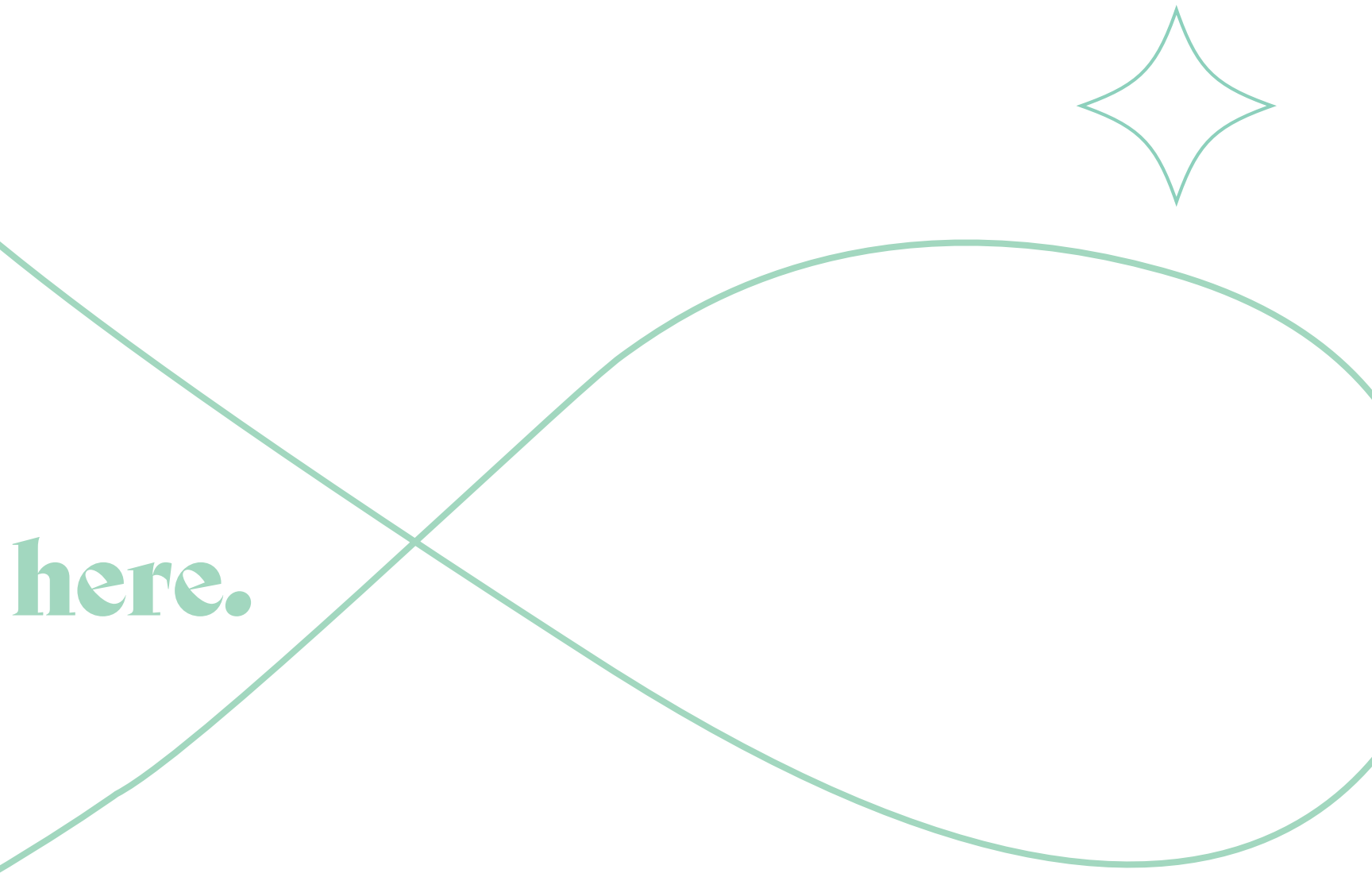
It's almost disarming to witness this acute self-awareness in an interview. For SHINee, however, the past becomes the foundation for the future. "When we debuted, I focused more on being a team player, making sure I played my role, making sure this team did well," Onew says, alluding to a feeling of being on autopilot. "But now, I've learned to be more considerate (of both myself and others). Being in this together, knowing what everyone's going through, and also pulling through together. I think that's where the shift was in my priorities, kind of making this group into what it is. Being more considerate of each other, and being more open with each other."

"When (people) listen to the album, we want them to think, 'Oh, of course, this is SHINee'. When they watch the music video, **'Oh, this is so SHINee',"** says Key. "We didn't put the emphasis too much on being experimental.

SHINee is back.

We're still





We've always been here.

ENDNOTES

How SHINee Found Their True Colours
https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/52025/1/shinee-dont-call-me-k-pop-2021-interview

COLOPHON

This book was created in the Summer Quarter of Two Thousand and Twenty Five at The Savannah College of Art and Design, Savannah Campus. It was an assignment created in the Graphic Design class of Five Hundred and One, Typographic Communication. The text of SHINee's Color is set in Montsserat Regular and Ciclo Display. This book was designed by Hollie Puterbaugh.

