

## A New Dionysus: Greek Myth in the Music of BTS

K-pop is a multi-million-dollar music industry that has gained the popularity among audiences world-wide. Several groups have used elements from Greek mythology in their production photos, videos, and live performances. Among them BTS stands out, a wildly popular K-pop group. Each of their albums has smashed records in sales, their videos in numbers of views, every tweet from their account is liked by millions within minutes. Their fans are collectively known as ARMY, and they represent a mighty force. Last year, within hours they matched the group's \$1M contribution to the BLM movement. In this paper, I focus on the various ways in which the group has incorporated elements of the myth of Dionysus in their performances, music, and lyrics. I examine the visual materials in two of their albums, *Map of the Soul: Persona* and *Map of the Soul: 7* and argue that they are explicitly based on ancient representations of Dionysiac rituals and of Greek symposia. Next, I analyze their 2019 performance at the Melon Music Awards, their most prominent engagement with Greek mythology. In this performance, each member of the group embodies a Greek god, laying a claim to a Greek-inspired cosmos. The performance ends with the performance of the song "Dionysus," which incorporates ritual elements from the festival of Dionysia.

Why does a K-pop boy band engage with the mythic god Dionysus? Some of the reasons can be found in the complicated legacy of imperialism and colonialism in South Korean culture (Chae 2020). To be sure, K-pop music itself is an amalgam of Korean and what we would call "western" musical genres. Dionysus, the god who transcends boundaries appeals to a group that also successfully defies musical, gender, and geographical definitions. The paper concludes by arguing that allusions to Greek myth enable the group to perform their own identifications as

celebrities and artists in their search for self-discovery; that it allows them to connect with their millions of fans by creating a new vision of the cosmos; and that it constitutes an advertisement for the universality of artistic creation.

### Bibliography

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