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K-POP

A SHORT ENCYCLOPEDIA



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Chapter One

K-pop definition and characteristics

“K-pop is a fusion of synthesized music, sharp dance routines and fashionable and colorful outfits...” —

INA Global

K-pop (an abbreviation of Korean pop; Hangeul: 케이팝) is a musical genre originating in South Korea that is characterized by a wide variety of audiovisual elements. Although it comprises all genres of "popular music" within South Korea, the term is more often used in a narrower sense to describe a modern form of South Korean pop music covering a range of styles including dance-pop, pop ballad, electropop, R&B and hip-hop music. The genre emerged with one of the earliest K-pop groups, Seo Taiji and Boys, forming in 1992. Their experimentation with different styles of music "reshaped Korea's music scene". As a result, the integration of foreign musical elements has now become common practice in the K-pop industry. K-pop entered the Japanese market at the turn of the 21st century and rapidly grew into a subculture among teenagers and young adults of East and Southeast Asia. With the advent of online social networking services, the current global spread of K-pop and Korean entertainment known as the Korean Wave is seen in Latin America, India, North Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere in the Western world.

Characteristics

Audiovisual content

Although K-pop generally refers to South Korean popular music, some consider it to be an all-encompassing genre exhibiting a vast spectrum of musical and visual elements. The French Institut national de l'audiovisuel defines K-pop as a 'fusion of synthesized music, sharp dance routines and fashionable, colorful outfits'. Songs typically consist of one or a mixture of pop, rock, hip hop, R&B and electronic music genres.

Systematic training of artists

Management agencies in South Korea offer binding contracts to potential artists, sometimes at a young age. Trainees live together in a regulated environment and spend many hours a day learning music, dance, foreign languages and other skills in preparation for their debut. This "robotic" system of training is often criticized by Western media outlets. In 2012, The Wall Street Journal reported that the cost of training one "idol" under S.M. Entertainment averaged US\$3 million.

Hybrid genre and transnational values

K-pop is a cultural product that features, as JungBong Choi and Maliangkay Roald says "values, identity and meanings that go beyond their strictly commercial value" (*K-pop - The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*. New York: Routledge, 2015). It is characterized by a mixture of Western sounds with an Asian aspect of performance. It has been remarked that there is a "vision of modernization" inherent in Korean pop culture. For some, the transnational values of K-pop are responsible for its success. A commentator at the University of California has said that "contemporary Korean pop culture is built on [...]"