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**LIVE REVIEW**

# K-Pop Superstars BTS Lit Up Citi Field's Stage. Their Fans Did the Rest.

**By Jon Caramanica**

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The bulbs cost \$57. In the hours before the versatile K-pop maximalists in BTS took the stage at Citi Field on Saturday night, fans were lining up by the thousands at stands throughout the Queens stadium, laying out not-insignificant amounts of cash for branded light sticks the shape of microphones and the size of Big Gulps.

Once in their seats, or out on the field, they held the lights — called Army bombs — aloft for the duration of BTS's two-and-a-half-hour show, waving them in time with the music as various patterns were triggered via Bluetooth, turning the crowd into an ever-shifting sea of color.

Shows of severe devotion are the norm in K-pop, but even in that universe, the fervor generated by the seven members of all-boy BTS — RM, J-Hope, V, Jimin, Jungkook, Suga and Jin — is unusually intense.



Fans lined up early to get as close to the group as possible, and spent \$57 on hand-held lights that changed color during the performance. Nina Westervelt for The New York Times

And Saturday night's vibrant, sometimes seismic concert, with a sold-out crowd of about 40,000, was a sort of dialogue between artist and fans, a collaborative exercise. It was the final show of the group's Love Yourself tour, and the group's first stadium performance, in this country. Some BTS fans — they are called Army — had been camping out for almost a week to be the first to receive general admission wristbands so they could stand as close to the center-field stage as possible

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Following several years in which K-pop's biggest and most ambitious performers have been making inroads into the United States, BTS has become the most successful K-pop act in this country. Released in May, "Love Yourself: Tear," its third album, became the first K-pop release to debut atop the Billboard album chart. The repackaged "Love Yourself: Answer," released in August, became the second.

Those albums show how BTS navigates an increasingly variegated and complex sound: Chainsmokers-esque EDM-pop, 1990s R&B, hip-hop from New York and the South, and much more. As singers and rappers, the members are gifted. As dancers and performers, they are nimble. And at this show, their execution was relaxed.

BTS's sold-out concert was a sort of dialogue between artist and fans.

Nina Westervelt for The New York Times

At its best, BTS's music is dense and polyvalent, verging on chaos. "DNA" began as Shawn Mendes-esque guitar pop and moved toward volcanic club music. "I Need U" was primal pop-R&B. "Airplane pt.2" had flickers of cabaret piano and Latin pop. "So What" had the airy frenzy of a Eurovision winner. A midshow medley of older songs posited stadium pop as action movie score, with slashing hard rock and industrial electronic music collapsed into one frenetic sequence.

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Near the end of the show, "The Truth Untold" showcased the sweet harmonies of the four singers (Jimin, Jin, Jungkook and V), and was immediately followed by "Outro: Tear," which displayed the versatility and range of the

three rappers (J-Hope, RM and Suga). Each member was given a solo turn as well — V's sensual R&B on “Singularity” was a high point, and on “Serendipity,” Jimin pulled off some balletic, “Matrix”-esque dance maneuvers.

For all the expert choreography and planning that went into this performance, what made it particularly accessible was the members' air of casualness, remaining calm on the surface while working furiously underneath. They understood the importance of small gestures — at several places, both onstage and in filmed interludes, a couple of members would briefly hold hands, or embrace, showing a playful, grounded warmth.

The group's outfits were elaborate, ranging from art house mariachi to modernist B-boy.  
Nina Westervelt for The New York Times

There were flickers of adult sexuality amid the show's overall chasteness, like when Jungkook, during an elaborate dance routine to "Fake Love," pulled up his shirt to reveal a quick glimpse of abs. (The outfits were elaborate, ranging from art house mariachi to S&M pirate to modernist B-boy.)

And some of the most engaging moments were the humorous ones, cutting the group's self-seriousness with a bit of irony and wit. At the beginning of "Singularity," V was caressing himself through a blazer draped on a hanger, and during "So What," one of the other members playfully ran his hand through Jimin's hair as he was staring into the camera with come-hither eyes.

These winks were also nods to the faithful, a way of taking the adulation of the fans and literalizing it onstage. That implicit conversation continued at the end of the show, with a series of earnest speeches in which each member professed his love for the Army.

At one point, Jimin doubled over in tears, but the most moving moment came from RM, the best English speaker in the group. He spoke about how thrilled he was to be in New York, "the place where the music that changed my life was first born." And he expounded on the theme of the tour and the group's recent music

"It feels like I'm using you guys to love myself," he said. "Please use me. Please use BTS to love yourself." The smiles in the crowd were brighter than any light.

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