



ERIN HOOLEY / CHICAGO TRIBUNE / TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE
South Korean K-pop band BTS performs in concert on May 11, 2019, at Soldier Field in Chicago.

K-pop albums offer more than music

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Assistant Editor

I've always been a big fan of pop music. There's just something about the catchy and upbeat style that scratches my brain in the perfect way. It should be no surprise then that I fell into the expansive world of K-pop. Decades and decades of music that I had never heard of, save for the few that crossed into mainstream U.S. music, like "Gangnam Style" by solo artist PSY or "Boy With Love" by the group Bangtan Sonyeondan, aka BTS.

With all this new music, I quickly realized one of my favorite aspects of K-pop: the physical albums.

I'm not bashing Spotify or Apple

Music by any means. I stream music as much as the next guy. But there's just something different about having a physical copy of something. Being able to hold an album in your hands and think, "Wow, this is mine" feels pretty cool. It's also a good way to support the artist and also get something for yourself.

Ever since I was little and we had fancy CD racks in the living room, I've loved looking at physical albums. Seeing what pictures the band chose to put in the lyric pamphlet and how they stylized it was interesting to me. Did they choose a simple font with no pictures? Or did they match the pages to the theme of the music? Granted, there weren't too many options to choose

from, but I thought it was so cool.

Imagine my surprise when I bought my first ever K-pop album, which was "Proof" by BTS. I opened it up, expecting the three CDs I was promised and maybe a lyric book as well. Instead, it seemed like a million different things fell out at me. Of course, I did get the promised music, but there was also a photobook, notes from the members, an abundance of photocards and a poster. Every album I've bought since then has been much the same.

It was amazing. Here I was, expecting simply the music I came to love. I got that plus so much more. The photocards are like your own personal lottery; there's a different one in each album. Some people buy multiple

albums just for the photocards! They might only be the size of a credit card, but they can resell for thousands of dollars. The most expensive re-sold photocard is one of Jungkook from BTS, which was bought for \$3,213.

It's like being a little kid again. I always loved the little vending machines in malls where you could get sticky hands, rubber ducks and bouncy balls. Buying a K-pop album creates that same experience. You might not know what exactly you're getting, but you know you're going to love it. Half of the thrill is simply the suspense and excitement.

I might be biased, but K-pop albums are the coolest collection of audio recordings out there.

Artist Trevor Steffen talks roots, style and inspiration

CAMRYN GARDNER
Staff Writer

From a small Madison apartment bedroom-turned-art-studio, a young man sits, focused on the canvas sitting atop his paint-stained easel. Before diving back into the colorful acrylic world with his paintbrush, he thoughtfully studies it while humming along to a hip-hop beat.

Looking into 22-year-old Trevor Steffen's art brings the viewer into another universe. A world where hands can come out of mouths, rivers flow through eyeballs, flowers bloom in the places of shoeprints and extraterrestrial creatures roam freely.

"Most of my inspiration comes from reality and a lot of what's actually getting put onto the canvas is my fantasy," Steffen said.

Born and raised in the small town of Reedsburg, Wisconsin, Steffen moved to Madison two years ago to be closer to the art scene and people with whom he can share his creative works. He took art classes in high school but is otherwise self-taught in his craft, often acrylic paintings done on canvas.

He has been drawing and painting for over 10 years, excelling in right-brain creativity. One of his earliest memories involves playing drawing games with his Grandma Mary, who greatly influenced Steffen's interest in the arts.

In addition to drawing and painting, Steffen is also a photographer and videographer.

After graduating from high school, Steffen experienced some life changes, pausing his artistic output. Since returning to art in 2020 he hasn't stopped, continuously producing paintings or at least putting effort into an ongoing piece.

"What inspired me to get back into it was actually a friend of mine, Tyson, asked me to paint the side wood piece of his nightstand. So, I did that for him, and it kind of sparked the whole interest again," Steffen said.

"Trevor wants to master his craft," said local rapper Tyson Tully. "He will literally paint over other paintings of his because he needs to get these creations, these visions out of his mind."

Steffen describes his style as cartoon realism, drawing from everyday moments and sprinkling in supernatural or mystical twists.

"(I) cartoon because there's a lot of bold colors with bold lines, so it gives kind of a cartoony vibe, but also realism because I use a lot of elements of real faces and real parts of the body. I use a lot of shading to make it look more realistic," Steffen said.

Steffen's good friend and frequent customer Dylan Dunse said of his style, "I've never seen anything like it before. You know, it's just super one-off."

Steffen's apartment walls are decorated with over 50 of his paintings. His art room



CAMRYN GARDNER / CLARION

Local artist Trevor Steffen describes his artistic style as cartoon realism that allows him to sprinkle in supernatural or mystic twists.



CAMRYN GARDNER / CLARION
A creation by Trevor Steffen.

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showcases several pieces, including several large 42-by-38-inch portraits. One is of a man with no irises in his tear-filled eyes. He is attached at the brain to a crimson red, monstrous looking creature with a wicked smile. Red, black and mauve paintbrush strokes make up the background. While this may be a bit harrowing to some viewers, do not fret, for Steffen has a variety of approaches.

One canvas shows a self-portrait, a painting of a face split down the middle. Half of this shows Steffen’s everyday appearance, flowing brown hair and hazel eyes with a green and white background. The other half shows a purple head and shoulder with several features that pique the mind’s interest. A creeping man shows up near the side of the figure’s head, as if looking down on him. Where this half of the painting’s eye

might be is a mouth, with misshapen eyes above it. In the chest is a square shaped hole, inside of it is another blue man painting.

Another canvas holds painted pieces of broken glass shards, faces appearing out of almost every bold, blue brush stroke on the canvas, evoking the viewer to stop and study the picture.

A different depiction sees tree branches making up the shape of a human eye, with lush green serving as the outside background. At the same time, the subject in the piece, a cyclops, holds onto the edge before falling into an allusive red and white spinning tunnel.

People, creatures or people turned into creatures make appearances in most of Steffen’s art. He has several paintings of silhouetted faces, with lines forming into faces. People in general inspire his creations.

“I see faces in everything — like spills and designs on, like, walls, and on the sidewalk, and in my dreams and everywhere,” Steffen said.

While he has a fulltime job now, Steffen hopes to find a career through his art. He hopes to paint murals around the Madison area. Like many people, he wants financial independence by doing something that fuels his soul.

Art is an escape for Steffen. He improves his craft each day by pouring a different part of himself or his world onto the canvas, gaining a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. In turn, the world gets to appreciate a unique style of art that Steffen has produced.

“I paint what I feel, and I paint what I see in some of my dreams. This is my way of getting through dark times, and it’s just an outlet as well,” he said.

To view Steffen’s art, visit his TikTok page, @R3V_studios, where he frequently posts new content.

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- SIGNS WILL DIRECT YOU TO THE PICK-UP LOCATION AT EACH CAMPUS
- REMAIN IN YOUR CAR AND HAVE YOUR TRUNK OPEN
- IF YOU HAVE COVID-19 SYMPTOMS OR HAVE TESTED POSITIVE, DONOT COME TO CAMPUS FOR FOOD PICK-UP.



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