

Three Patch Podcast – Episode 148a

Celebrating BTS Comeback: Festa 2025 to Comeback

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SHOWNOTES

Consulting Fans: Johnlocked, DrinkingCocoa, SundayDuck, Suspup, B
Producer/Editor: Johnlocked

BTS is back and so are we! Celebrate the BTS Comeback with Johnlocked, DrinkingCocoa, SundayDuck, Suspup and B, as we reflect on the band's post-military enlistment era from Festa 2025 until their official comeback in March 2026. And stay tuned for part 2, a deep dive into their new album Arirang!

- [Episode 110: Transcultural Fandom segment](#)
- [Episode 111: Fandom of Interest: BTS](#)
- [Episode 122: BTS Comeback 2021](#)
- [Episode 124: BTS Concerts: Permission To Dance LA](#)
- [Episode 144: The BTS Not-Hiatus and Indigo](#)
- [Namjoon's forced photo](#) with former president Yoon Suk-Yeol during military service
- [RM's APEC 2025 speech](#)
- [HYBEBOY YouTube channel](#) for excellent translations

TRANSCRIPT

MUSIC INTRO (ends at 00:00:29)

Johnlocked: Hello, and welcome to episode 148 of the Three Patch Podcast celebrating BTS' comeback. I'm Johnlocked, and I'm here with...

Hosts: DrinkingCocoa, SundayDuck, Suspup, and B.

Johnlocked: Yay! We're all back.

B: It's me.

Suspup: So happy to see everybody's faces.

B: A true comeback.

Johnlocked: We've discussed BTS many times on this podcast, with mention of their impact in episode 110's Transcultural Fandom segment, a full introduction to the band as episode 111's featured Fandom of Interest, a discussion of their 2021 comeback in episode 122, their L.A. concerts in episode 124, and their Not-Hiatus and a deep dive into one of their solo albums in episode 144. We'll link to all the case files for these segments if you'd like to catch up on our journey with BTS from 2020 through their military enlistment era. Today, we're back to talk about their reunion after completing mandatory military enlistment, their comeback album *Arirang*, filmed content and concerts, and their current world tour spanning, what is it, seventy-some shows?

B: I think it's seventy-two?

Suspup: I thought it was eighty.

Johnlocked: They're up to eighty now and they keep adding on stuff for next spring, so it's going to be over a year on tour, I believe. There's a lot we're going to talk about today, but if you haven't been following the band closely for the past few years, I wanted to give a quick rundown of what the band has been doing since their last group album. Their last group album was released on June 10, 2022 -- it was *Proof*, a three-disc perspective that had three new songs and one disc of demos -- and then three days later, on June 13th at Festa dinner, the group announced that they were going to be pausing group activities for military service enlistment and doing some solo projects, and this was called a hiatus by many folks (or by us, the Not-Hiatus) because what we found out was this was not a hiatus from music. Since then, they have released fifteen features, thirteen solo singles, two group singles, eleven solo albums, one solo live concert album, and one group live concert album, and that's just their music releases. That's

not counting their best-selling biography *Beyond The Story: A 10-Year Record of BTS*, which hit number one on New York Times and Amazon; their popular streaming series like *Suchwita*, *Hope on the Street*, *Run Jin*, *Kian's Bizarre B&B*, *Jinny's Kitchen*, and *Are You Sure?!*; their behind-the-scenes feature-length documentary films and their multitude of variety show appearances, performances and live stages, including the FIFA World Cup opening ceremony, two Lollapalooza festivals, and three solo tours through Asia, Europe, and North America.

Suspup: Well, I'm overwhelmed.

Johnlocked: So that was from June 2022 through 2025. They did all of that, and also made it through their between 18 and 21 months of mandatory military service; then in June of 2025, one year ago, all the members completed their service, and at last reunited as a group.

Hosts: Yay, yay!

B: I really thought it would never come, and it did.

Suspup: It took a long few years.

Johnlocked: Three years -- three busy years -- and since so much has happened, I thought we could continue chronologically. How have you been feeling since June 2025 until their comeback album?

Suspup: Relieved, I think, is a big part of it for me. I worried about them in the service a lot, even though I tried to avoid any news about what was going on with them unless it was official, but I still worried. I was really relieved when they were done; in the little tidbits that they did share with the world, I could tell they were all very relieved, too, so I think that was the biggest thing at first, and then it's just been excitement and anticipation leading up to the comeback and then the concert tour and seeing them together in twos, threes, and as a group. All of that has just been so... I don't know how to describe it. It's just beautiful. Feels really, really beautiful.

B: It's healing.

Suspup: There you go.

B: It's healing, yeah.

Suspup: It is healing.

B: I was worried about Jin. I know he has giant shoulders, but he shouldered so much before everybody was released, and then he was still too busy to show up at the beginning of the album process for this comeback, this major thing. It was obviously joy, but also I was like, 'Okay, phew, J-Hope's out. Okay. He can take a little bit of the pressure off. They can do Festa

together,' and then it was a relief to see all of them, these seven pillars, holding each other up instead of just one or two of them having to do things on their own. They did great, but also they're meant to be seven. I think watching on my phone the little shaky livestreams of them coming out of the military service and Namjoon with his saxophone... I don't know. It was just such a sense of surreal. I've been ARMY for so long and we've been expecting this for so long, and then it finally happened and it was like, 'Oh, man, they're really doing it. This is for real this time.' It's not just like, 'Oh, the government's going to change the rules or whatever.' I know they worried about us waiting for them, but I was like, 'I would wait a couple more years, honestly.' We ate really well during their absence.

Hosts: Yeah, yeah.

B: It's been a year. I'm still processing, if that's wild to say. Ugh...

Johnlocked: Yeah. I've been thinking a lot about where we were as a fandom a year ago and the things that we were seeing one year ago and that touching in... Yeah. It was J-Hope and Jin carrying a lot and doing Festa promotions, and then on Festa last year we had the J-Hope concert where all the members attended, and that was our first time seeing Yoongi in his mask and just seeing them all together at the concert.

Suspup: Jimin covering up his face all the time. Poor baby.

Johnlocked: How everyone felt just to know they were sharing space.

SundayDuck: It was very strange being thrown in the deep end of K-pop and BTS ARMY membership, and I feel like I hyperfixated and absorbed as much as I could and I still was looking for more. Then the announcement came that they had to go into the military, and it was really interesting because most people did not take it well, which I get -- I totally get, aside from the fact that they were going to be missing for up to two years (not missing but not available as much) -- but also, there was the fear of what that would mean for them individually. Would they get along in the military? I don't know the culture enough to know how accepted they would be as idols. I know that was a concern of mine, and I just really was hoping, hoping, hoping that people would be kind but not treat them differently or special, because I know they would be upset by that probably. Then it seemed, when the announcement came during the Busan concert -- when they were like, 'Yeah, this is it, we're going in, we're going to start going in' -- most of us that were watching that Busan concert together cried about that.

B: I was there with you.

SundayDuck: Yeah, and it was very bittersweet. I remember thinking, 'My God, it's going to be so long. What the hell are we going to do?' and then before we knew it -- before I knew it, there was still more content and there were solo tours, and there was Lollapalooza and Hobipalooza. There was still so much content, and then also it gave me the opportunity to get hyperfixated on

some other K-pop groups. I learned to love Ten and Shinee and Ateez and got to see them. I thought it was going to be a miserable, miserable time and it wasn't for me personally, just because it was like, 'They're fine, they're doing well.' They're checking in every now and again, they're taking care of each other, and ARMY took care of itself and took care of each other. We were all really gentle with each other, I think, checking in and stuff like that; I saw a lot of that online, and I really loved it. But now they're back, and people are rightfully, justifiably elated. When I think about it, I can't wipe the smile off my face. It's just such a wonderful feeling that they're back. ARMY is behind them in full force. There was no hesitation at all; their fears had been laid to rest. They're hitting on all cylinders, the new album slaps, the concert was amazing. Everything was great, so keep going, guys.

B: Til they're old grandpas, right, and soon to be old and gray? Who's going to get one of them to learn guitar at some point?

Suspup: Please!

SundayDuck: Yoongi. He plays.

DrinkingCocoa: Yeah. He plays.

B: No, no, Yoongi wants them to learn guitar because he's like, "We're all going to be old and ugly at some point, and I want you guys to learn. I want you guys to learn an instrument so we can be BTS forever."

Suspup: He said something about Joonie bringing his bass, so I think Joon is maybe learning bass.

SundayDuck: I know Tae's got his trombone, trumpet, whatever.

B: That'd be really bad for my health, actually.

SundayDuck: Trumpet. Trumpet, not trombone.

Hosts: Yeah.

SundayDuck: Maybe Jimin will learn flute or something.

Suspup: Oh, my God. Pied Piper with flute accompaniment.

SundayDuck: That's right.

B: Actually, I just watched the documentary. Jungkook said he played the flute, so maybe it'll be Jungkook that does the flute. Yeah.

SundayDuck: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Hosts: Holy cow.

DrinkingCocoa: I was remembering that when they had to go into military service, I thought they absolutely had to go. They cannot possibly afford to get an exemption because they are so big that, in a highly stratified society like Korea, people look up to and resent the hell out of whoever is considered to be the representative success of the culture. If they were slightly less dominant, then maybe they could have considered getting an exemption, but because they were so dominant, if they skipped out on military service for any reason, they would not be accepted back into the culture; they would be considered too hatefully, unrelatably superior and they would be hated. But I thought if they go through with the military service and they come out the other side, they can have and do anything they want. They will be untouchable because they'll have proven that they went and did what everybody else does and I figured that some of them would successfully win people over, and I pretty much knew Namjoon would not be one of them and that he would be tortured. When he says now that there are things about military service that he won't talk about, I hear lawyers in there. I don't use the word 'torture' lightly. There's just some kinds of success or dominance that human nature is not able to tolerate, and I think there was some sense of wanting to teach this guy a lesson because he's a lot of things that the military doesn't want you to be as an individual.

Hosts: Yep.

Suspup: Thinking back to what you said about them being the representative, he's the representative of the representative, too. Oof.

DrinkingCocoa: Yeah. I also knew that they would have to bribe their way through military service, and we heard about that. We heard about them buying meals for everybody because they were older than all the other service members. In Korea, if you're older, you have to pay for everybody; that shows that you know your place and everybody else knows their place, and that makes it easier for people to accept that this super wealthy guy is doing push-ups next to them. That makes it easier for people to accept that because they're older and more experienced, they can also give advice, so that would ease some of the resentment for a lot of them, I think. I thought, 'Yeah, it's not a joke what they had to go through, but if they make it out (and presumably they will, because most Koreans make it out of military service eventually), then no one will be able to tell them what to do. There will be a forever hardening, a forever loss of innocence, a forever freedom, an ability to tell corporate or other powers-that-be to get lost that will be unprecedented, and they'll be able to show what a former boy band can become into adulthood. That was super, super exciting, but then the context of their military service coincided with Korea's brief, wretched dip into fascism. There was this very fascist president, Yoon Suk Yeol, who served from May 2022 until he was thrown out of office April 2025, two months before comeback. The seven of them served in the military from December 2022 to June

2025, and when they started going into military service, that was during the first few months of this new fascist regime that was attempting to exploit them to be state mouthpieces for no pay. There's no winning if you're going to be exploited this way, which I think made it more urgent than ever that they enlist on their own terms in a way that probably made that regime really frustrated. 'Oh, those wily musicians... They escaped our grasp. Darn it!' We even saw some... There's this photo that haunted me throughout Namjoon's enlistment...

Johnlocked: Namjoon's photo, yes. We'll have a link to it.

DrinkingCocoa: Yeah. The fascist president visited that regiment and made him stand with the other soldiers right next to him to prove how much BTS supported this fascist regime, and Namjoon's face looked... Every single muscle in his face was doing something different. He was so angry and disgusted and you could see his skin crawling, and that expression is the expression that you can see of all surviving photographs of when Korea was under Japanese occupation; you would see the Korean people who did the actual work standing in ceremonial photos with the Japanese officials who were taking all the credit, and the Korean guys would have to be there holding the Japanese flag. Namjoon's face was that face exactly.

Suspup: Holy shit.

DrinkingCocoa: It haunted me. They managed to use the military to escape being exploited by these clowns. Military service is not usually seen as your great escape, but it did serve that way, and then through coincidence of timing, the new president -- the democratically elected president who is healing over a lot of things, Lee Jae Myung -- took office on June 4th shortly before Festa, shortly before Namjoon was released. They went into service escaping fascism, and they emerged out of it into a much more familiar landscape, more similar to what Korea had been when they developed. Then during that time when they were gathering themselves (because of course, like everybody, I was watching minutely for every single sign of healing from the seven guys), every time they looked a little bit more relaxed, every time it looked like they had been able to talk to each other, it was such a relief. But during that time, some of the rest of us in the world had not escaped our fascist governments and are not able to put presidents in jail for life.

Hosts: Yet.

DrinkingCocoa: There was this incident in September 2025 that was right as they were starting to gather together to start working on this album that, to me, encapsulated the job that BTS has to do, because, more than any other K-wave band, they have the job of being outward-facing, of being international diplomats. They're much better known internationally than they are domestically; they're not all that beloved or respected just as musicians as part of the pop landscape in Korea, compared to the international reception of them, because that's their job. They are sent abroad. In September of 2025, the U.S. government, in their zeal to hit quotas of rounding up random immigrants or workers on work visas (people of color) and showing how

tough they are by just randomly making those people suffer, accidentally arrested hundreds of Korean executives instead of the poor people they thought they could get away with. They made this big mistake, right? 'Oh, but all yellow people look alike. We didn't know we were arresting people who have money. Oops!'

SundayDuck: Yeah.

DrinkingCocoa: Yeah, and they treated the Korean executives that have money and tech and know-how the same way that they thought they could treat people who they consider having no influence. Once they realized, 'Oh, shoot, we mistreated the wrong yellow people,' that's exactly the kind of thing that the Korean cultural wave is designed to try to balance out: Koreans having experienced being on the very bottom of the global shitpile. What can a very small country with very few natural resources do to have enough global respect so that maybe the citizens aren't treated so badly anymore? There was a small but commendable effort from Koreans after that incident to say, 'The way they treated us, they shouldn't be treating anyone that way. We don't want to just be treated better because we have money. You probably shouldn't treat people from other countries that way either.' That is exactly the kind of thing that BTS is supposed to combat. That's their mission. That will lead to international status for them (superstar status), but of course, the envy that comes with being that big. I was nervous watching what they were going to have to do to keep Korea's profile in play during this time globally when it is out of fashion to be anything but white. There's more resentment of people of color who are global players now than there were a few years ago.

SundayDuck: I agree with you as far as the right-wing half of the globe, but us liberals... I don't know if that necessarily holds true.

DrinkingCocoa: I don't think the Korean soft culture thinktanks are worried about winning or losing the U.S. liberals. The U.S. liberals are fine; it's the people who make decisions about how many people from Korea can go overseas on work visas, etc.

SundayDuck: I get ya. Okay.

DrinkingCocoa: And the tariff situation. Threats of ruining the entire economy of many, many different Asian countries with sudden, across-the-board, arbitrary tariffs pulled out of somebody's butt... That kind of off-the-cuff announcement can tank whole economies overnight, and a few countries are given sort of a pass with respect. 'Okay, these countries are actually big enough to leave alone.' Korea becoming recognized... That job has been given to K-drama, to the skincare industry, to BTS.

Johnlocked: To tie this through to BTS a little more, this is making me think of the speech that RM (Namjoon) gave at APEC 2025 about the cultural impact and the financial impact of what they do. I think that's worth linking in our show notes, too, because he was given this platform at

APEC to speak on the importance of investing in creation (in creative pursuits, in culture), and that's what BTS does.

DrinkingCocoa: Korea doesn't have anything to export except human labor. We don't have a whole lot of natural resources. Koreans don't sleep. This is a theme that you will see in BTS and in basically all of K-entertainment: 'We're going to be even more successful by sleeping even less!'

B: Look, they just released -- It's Festa time right now, where they're releasing things, and I watched Jungkook's little vlog and he's like, 'All right, it's 11 p.m. I'm just now starting my workout,' and I'm like, 'What?!' He's like, "Yeah, I'm going to go for a couple hours and then maybe I'll sleep for two hours, and then we'll get up and go again." I'm like, 'Oh...' Oh, boy.

Hosts: Yeah.

DrinkingCocoa: So what I'm saying can be really dry and lecture-y, but that is actually what BTS has been designed to do. That's their remit.

SundayDuck: I have a question for you, though. Do you think that BTS (the boys, the group)... Do you think they're aware of this?

DrinkingCocoa: Oh, my God, yes!

Suspup: I do, yeah.

SundayDuck: Okay.

DrinkingCocoa: How could they not be? Every single decision they make is with this in mind. They have to keep in mind, on the one hand, that they're representing politically everything that Korea is seen as internationally. Then on the other hand, if they have even the slightest hint of being corporate or commercial, then they won't be sincere and they will lose the fan base.

SundayDuck: Here's why I ask you that question, because in watching the documentary that was on Netflix, it was very interesting to me that when Bang PD -- it might have been him, it might have been one of the other executives -- proposed putting *Arirang* on the end of *Body to Body*, the immediate reaction, from especially Namjoon, was no.

DrinkingCocoa: Yep.

B: "We're going to be too nationalistic."

SundayDuck: Yes. Too nationalistic. He's like, "We're not big enough for that." It was very self-deprecating (I've grown to expect self-deprecation from these guys), but it also was very striking

to me because I thought, 'Do they not have an awareness, a true awareness, of how influential they are in Korean culture?'

Suspup: To me, that's exactly why he said it was too nationalistic. In my opinion, he was worried about... Whenever they're on lives and half of the comments are, "speak English, speak English," and they're like, "No, I'll speak whenever the hell I want to speak," but at the same time, they understand. They feel that pressure to be international and they understand that, so that's why he was worried about putting something that's so very, very, very quintessentially Korean in that song.

B: But at the same time, he was fighting for more Korean lyrics.

Hosts: Yeah, yeah.

B: They said there was too much English, so I don't know if that's the full idea of it. Building from what you're saying, I feel like they didn't want to have their comeback -- this big, massively expected comeback -- be "Here's a postcard from Korea. We're the Korean guys. Hey, here we are!"

Suspup: That's a good point.

B: That's the way I interpreted what he was saying. There's such a change in attitude. Obviously, they're a bit older and they've been through quite a bit more life experiences, but whenever *Idol* was coming out during that comeback time -- it was right after they had made it in the U.S., they had won their AMA, had a lot of success with *DNA* -- that's whenever I think it was starting to kick in for them that they did have this international responsibility. They've even said it themselves; they were like, "It was out of our control in some elements where it just ballooned massively until everybody knew our name." If you take their attitude from *Idol* -- where it was like, "We're Korean! You're going to listen to us because we're Korean. This is where we're from." The outfits, the stages, all of that stuff... Their performance at the MAMAs for 2018 was, 'WHOA!' Jimin did a fan dance. 'You can't stop me loving myself, this is who I am' -- to Namjoon worrying about being too nationalistic or patriotic or these kinds of things. I don't know. I can't know what's in his brain, but that was what I was thinking about while I was watching the documentary, being like, 'Ah, this is a change in attitude, and the world has changed.' The world has changed a lot since 2018.

Hosts: Yeah.

B: There's been a lot going on. That was on my mind.

Johnlocked: I think a lot of it comes from that fear of it seeming nationalistic as they're coming out of the military, and for Namjoon specifically (his experiences with the military, the things that DrinkingCocoa just spoke to earlier about his service in particular and how he was

used by the more fascist government at the time for photo ops) to come out of the military and have something that is released as your first album back as a group (all now veterans of military service) be something that has a nationalistic tilt to it could feel like endorsing parts of the government or parts of the military that Namjoon might not be comfortable with, so I wonder if that had a part to how he was personally feeling about it. Also, this is a song... I think we should probably -- at this point, actually, I would love to transition into talking about *Arirang* as an album concept, because before we got the documentary, we got the name of the album and some basic concept things, and that was our first exposure to all of us and everyone's looking up, "What does *Arirang* mean? What is the cultural significance of *Arirang* as a song?" All of fandom was doing their detective work, putting on our Sherlock Holmes hats and trying to look under the microscope to see what they could be trying to convey just even with the album title before we got the music. Then we get later the behind-the-scenes of the documentary as seeing them being presented that album concept, that title, and integrating that song into their opening track and all the weight that went into those decisions in advance of it coming to us.

DrinkingCocoa: I want to go back to something that we were talking about, and it does connect up to exactly what you're leading into. One thing to keep in mind about Namjoon and J-Hope especially not being sure if they wanted to do the *Arirang* patriotic blast into that song is that they had not been on tour as a band for years. If you think back to pandemic lockdown and how you felt rejoining human society after everybody being alone in their house not talking to other humans for years, and then you emerge and you talk to other humans and you don't know how to do it, you think that maybe you should just turn around and put your sweatpants back on and go home for another six months. They were going through that as a band together, especially worrying that they had surpassed their relevance, that their expiration date had passed because of course, being so dominant, everybody wanted that to be true. There were a lot of different, competitive, nasty behind-the-scenes pot shots at them all the time (as there will be for anybody who's that dominant), so they were in a very uncertain position. What if they went out in public with this and it was an enormous flop? That was entirely possible, and they depended a lot on their internal trust in the art, in the validity of the art, to feel like, 'Okay, well, that's my compass.' I didn't know, until we saw the documentary, this was a suggestion from corporate. Any artist can identify instantly with every cell of your body screaming, 'No, I don't take suggestions from corporate about my art, because if I don't believe it, everybody's going to know and it's going to flop.' What I was super impressed by is that Bang PD was completely one hundred percent correct. I'm thrilled that he won this argument. He has not been in the military all this time; he's been in the business (he knows that this would work), but also he wasn't thinking of this only as an album. Watching the documentary made me realize, 'Oh, the album itself is not at all a complete thing,' and then I realized it's more like the soundtrack to a movie. He was preparing for the world tour, and he saw exactly how this would energize the choreographic throughline (the concept of the world tour), and these musicians, these composers and singers, they're not mentally there yet. Aside from the extremely fraught position of being exploited by this extremely corporate corporation and being in the position of supervisable artists that they are (where everybody wants to exploit them), can they trust? I

didn't blame them for having that immediate allergic reaction, especially because the song *Body to Body* has nothing in it to tie it to *Arirang*. It was such a forced mashup.

B: It's such a banger, though!

SundayDuck: It calls back to... Is it the 1988 Seoul Olympics?

DrinkingCocoa: They had to make that up. They had to retcon.

SundayDuck: They had to retcon that?

DrinkingCocoa: No, they did.

SundayDuck: Okay.

DrinkingCocoa: They said they did.

Johnlocked: No, they changed the lyrics to make that happen, so I wouldn't call it a retcon. We can dive into *Body to Body* since we want to first go through what *Arirang* means. People who don't know...

Suspup: The title of the album.

Johnlocked: Yeah, the title of the album and the release, and then let's dive into the tracks.

Suspup: I remember reading a few articles when they released the name, and there was one person who was second generation Korean-American and she went and asked her parents. She said, "If I say the word 'Arirang', what does that mean to you?" and they both just got all misty-eyed and started talking about their lives back in Korea when they lived there and it was really, really moving. Then somebody else had posted six or seven YouTube links to different recordings of it (in different styles, even different tunes and all of that), and I started to get a tiny inkling of the impact of that, so that was really cool. At the time, not knowing anything else and being sort of naive about it, I thought, 'Oh, well, they know that they're international, but they also need to reinforce that they are first and foremost Korean,' and so they're bringing it back to that.

B: I will say, for at least the marketing aspects of it, I was not on board with the 'What is your love song?'

Suspup: That still doesn't make sense to me.

Johnlocked: I didn't -- Yeah, I had a hard time with that as well.

B: Yeah. There was a big marketing push and posters being put up and things like that, and tagging famous people 'What is your love song?' It didn't fit with how I listened to the album, and it didn't really fit with how I interact with BTS. I don't know. They can sing a love song, but it's never just a love song.

SundayDuck: Yeah. The concept felt very reductionist to me.

B: Right. It felt like it was very safe.

SundayDuck: Yeah.

B: It was a very safe route. JL said it earlier, where as soon as the title was released, ARMY started digging deep into it because we expect that level of commitment to language as an art from these particular men. I know they had other people help them with the lyrics, but I was honestly a little put off initially, and I'm someone who's like, 'I'm going to be there for them no matter what. Doesn't matter if I don't like the album. I believe in them so much that I will do what I can to understand where they were coming from,' and it released a lot of pressure off of me to think, 'Okay, even if I don't like any of the tracks, I trust them so much as artists,' which I know they would self-depreciate at, being like, 'No, we can make bad music, too.' I don't know... They're just such thoughtful people in every aspect, and the documentary really shows a lot of that, too, but they've shown that over and over again every album, every release, every solo release, all of the stuff. Well, maybe not all of the solo releases. We have "Seven Days a Week"; that really tells us what Jungkook feels.

Johnlocked: Yeah. I was going to say some of J-Hope's recent solos...

B: Right. I'm glad they have the freedom to make those kind of sounds and they can still come back home to seven and come back to their cultural impact that they know they're going to do. I think their worry was real in that you can hear Yoongi (Suga)... In every interview or whatever, he's just like, "These trends, they change so fast. We have to keep up. Of what we record now, is this going to sound good in two months? What are we thinking of?" You can see all of the members... Each time someone brings up that they're 'legendary', 'once in a generation', 'Icons,' they all visibly go like *shudders* Think about it in those terms and they are, but I don't know. There's a very attractive humility and thoughtfulness to their work that I think lends to their longevity, and having such a historic name... I didn't know anything about the song. I'm not part of that historical context or cultural context, but having that be this touchstone, it just had to be seven dudes recording this first track in the U.S. I say 'track'... This first gramophone, whatever - little recording cylinder -- just felt fateful, and the more I learned about it and the more I took the time to listen to their thoughts (read the Rolling Stone interviews, this kind of stuff) and more of that as time has gone on, I think it's almost a bigger feeling. Even if I didn't like any of the tracks, I think I would respect the album anyway for what it's trying to do, what it represents. I don't know if that made any sense.

Johnlocked: Yeah, and I came from the same place as you, B, when they were talking about... I would probably say it was a marketing campaign. I don't know how much the members had a say in branding everything of 'What is your love song?' and I had the same kind of visceral reaction of, 'Oh, I hope it isn't an album of just love songs, because that's not what I go to BTS for.' I love some of their more romantic songs, of course (they're good), but what hooked me with BTS is the lyricism and the deeper meaning and the double/triple/quadruple layers to their lyrics, and a lot of that is about the 'love yourself' campaign, the various big picture psychological issues they take on with their music, things that are deeply personal yet resonant with people around the world that they share through their lyrics. I am always looking for that level of depth, and so saying 'What is your love song?' felt, 'Oh, is this album going to have some of that resonance for me?' Something that one of the YouTubers I follow, HYBEBOY, who does translation videos for all of their lives (and does really great cultural translations, too, where he helps give context to certain things): a couple of lives, there's been mentions of the word 'romance' in how the members are speaking about certain things being romantic, and he's like, 'Actually, this word 'romantic' (the way that we translate it to English) is the same 'romantic', but the Korean meaning is more about when you think of the emotional resonance of something and something feeling romantic. It doesn't mean 'love romantic'." It is that feeling... 'swelling of emotion' is the romance of something, and that's the word that they were trying to define and it just gets condensed down to 'romance' in auto-translate. So I'm wondering now, reflecting on that campaign of 'what is your love song?', 'love song,' and then looking at what *Arirang* as a song is, it's a folk song that has so many different versions. There's oral tradition, dozens of versions all around the country that have been passed on in different tunes, different words that then was incorporated as yeah, to maybe telling of a lost love and that longing feeling (and that can be BTS to ARMY), but also then used in revolutionary acts during Japanese occupation and protests and a way of showing cultural solidarity so that 'love song' could be love of Korean culture, it could be love of their community, and then, of course, love of their fandom and that longing that they had while they were away in military service. I've been trying to expand my view of what that campaign maybe could have meant. I agree it felt very condensed down to surface level in how it was being plastered around buildings, but I think that diving into the meaning of *Arirang* culturally and doing that detective work -- watching the animated video that they released, seeing the story of the seven men who came and did the first recording in the U.S. of *Arirang* the folk song -- there's just so much cultural resonance that we just get a little fingertip, tip of the iceberg of it.

B: Just the tip!

Johnlocked: Right? Just the tip. Just getting to learn more and more and read more of those experiences that you were talking about, Sus, that people have been having in response to the album title and to the integration of *Arirang* into that first track, I'm trying to deepen my appreciation even of the songs on the album that are more love songs that seem to read more as [what] could be a flat or two-dimensional, one-dimensional love song. I'm like, 'Maybe if I look deeper...' and that's really what Namjoon's recent live was telling us to do and explaining. That's where I'm sitting right now with the love or romance aspects of it.

B: With the love campaign and then the first single they released with “Swim,” I didn't listen to the song first. I watched the music video first, and I was like, 'Maybe I'll sit this one out, boys.' I don't know. It was just a white lady crying and dancing on a ship. I was like, 'I want to see the boys. You put them in these sailor outfits, and then you only show me a little bit of it. Jimin is showing both of his nipples at this point. I want to see *them*.' It really made me quite nervous in that same vein of thinking this would be more of a...

Suspup: Mostly romantic, yeah.

B: Yeah. Well, because there was a lot of criticism during their solos, especially, I feel, of Jungkook. There was a lot of criticism in ARMY of, 'Oh, it's too Western. He didn't have a single Korean song on here.' There was a lot of thought that they would lose this connection by becoming so international, and I don't think it's unintentional that one of the best little vocal stims in the whole album is "This is international. Make it unforgettable." Okay, that's all I had.

DrinkingCocoa: When I first heard the title of the album, I had chills. I think I maybe screamed. I was so impressed at how audacious it is, because it would take a truly titanic artist to say that they owned Korean artistic soul so much that they could just lay claim to this one word, “Arirang,” and have everyone acknowledge, "Yes, you earned it. You deserve it. It's yours."

Suspup: Oh, now I'm getting chills. That's such a good way to put it.

DrinkingCocoa: And it instantly made me think, 'Oh, I bet there are going to be Korean instruments on it (traditional Korean instruments), I bet there are going to be Easter egg callouts to Korean historical/artistic/cultural artifacts. I bet they're going to say that what we do (as pop cultural, as throwaway and commercial as it is, is a completely direct lineage from 300, 500, 700 years ago. You can't dismiss us. We come from that, we are that, and the whole Korean cultural/national fantasy of the rest of the world appreciating that Korean culture has resonance... That's why we're successful internationally, because people see that in what we do. You can't dismiss us. You can envy us, but you can't dismiss us.' I got all of that from *Arirang*. The very bizarre thing about *Arirang* (which I don't think there's an American counterpart to): this is a song that has no negative connotations. I cannot think of anything American that invokes the same instant unanimous love from everybody. I kind of get close to it with Dolly Parton, but it's really not the same thing, because it goes back so many centuries.

Johnlocked: Jungkook loves her!

DrinkingCocoa: If you don't love Dolly Parton, get yourself checked out; there's something wrong. To the extent that even North Korea and South Korea respond in the same thrilled way to *Arirang*, which is not the case for most things. Then I cannot stand -- Any of their heterosexual PR stuff makes me go, 'That's not what I'm here for,' which -- that's my unfair expectation. They probably enjoy making that kind of content more than I enjoy hearing it from

them, but the thing to remember about 'love song' is that when the seven 19th century Korean men went to Howard University and recorded on the wax cylinders *Arirang*, it was mislabeled as a love song. It's not a love song, but that's what the label says.

Suspup: I didn't know that. That's wild.

DrinkingCocoa: It's totally not that, but it was labeled as a Korean love song and misunderstood in that way. I'm not sure how many non-Koreans got this, but it's so hilarious to me. *Arirang* -- lots of people who don't speak Korean have heard it or syllabically sounded it out or sung along to it -- it's a petty song. It's so petty. What it basically says is "The person who ditched me on this long mountain trek -- my supposed ally who was supposed to be with me, that just threw me under the bus -- I hope their feet fall off. Walk off without me, why don't you? Well, you're going to step on something that's going to infect. Haha!" You say that knowing that you're probably going to starve and die on the mountaintop because this person has gone off without you. It's really petty, and that's hilarious. Eventually, probably, these people are going to meet up again. "You left me." "Yeah, I know." "Did your feet fall off?" "Actually, only one of them." It's a song about long suffering.

Johnlocked: It's a song about karma and vengeance. There's karma that is woven into this album in different places, too.

DrinkingCocoa: So I'm thinking all these things, and then I was disillusioned a little bit to get the rude reminder, when watching the documentary, how much of a corporate decision it was to name the album that and that it did not come organically from the seven guys that we think of as creating everything from their own heads. They had to be talked into it, and some of their hesitation looked to me like, 'Can we pull that off? That's such an audacious move, and I guess corporate thinks we can or I guess that's our new job and we better not fail.' But that's the experience of being Korean and being told, "Oh, you're the best ever": "Or else." Every time you escape the executioner by being the best ever, that just means that next time you have to do exponentially better; if you do only as well as you did last time, that's just as much of a failure, so that's the pressure. If you look at them, if you wonder why they're always saying "I'm sorry, that was only great, not spectacular. Next time, I'll work harder for you," and you're like, "What? You did fine. You did better than anybody else in history has ever done!" They don't even hear you.

B: I'm cooking a little bit on what you're saying. In terms of them having pushback against using *Arirang* as their central piece, I like that they came around to it. I think also, so much of this pressure in 'What is their sound supposed to be now?' ... There's so many different recordings of it -- there's so many different interpretations of the song -- but Namjoon says it's like eating kimchi at a Paris Baguette. He was like, "It doesn't feel like us. It doesn't feel like what we're supposed to sound like." That's where I felt like some of that hesitation was coming from, because I don't think they knew what they were supposed to sound like. What is BTS 2.0 supposed to actually be? There's one point where Jimin also says it, where he's like, "If we're going to change our sound, this is the time to do it. This is the time for us to have (it's gross) a

'rebranding' of them," but I think it also shows in how hard they pushed for... Especially J-Hope and V were like, "We need more mature lyrics, we need more mature themes," and I think hearing that corporate wanted to theme this around a folk song... Is that really cool? 'Are we cool guys?' I'm trying to think of it in terms of [how] they're trying to present this mature second chapter and have all of their new experiences under their belt (performing solo, doing solo tours for some of them) and then having this suggestion. I don't know if they could hear it. Namjoon, when he first hears *Arirang* in "Body to Body," immediately looks at Yoongi; he looks over at Suga, and Suga can see it on his face where he's like, 'I'm not vibing with this. I don't like the way this sounds. I don't think this is the sound that we're looking for.' I'm glad that's why they are a team; even though several of them expressed it, I think it was also Jimin again who was like, "I wish we could all be excited about this together. I wish we could all be in this process, like everybody agrees with everything," and then to have Namjoon by himself saying "It's hard for us to make decisions now because we all have big egos. We've all done music by ourselves; we've all created things by ourselves, and we have ideas about what we want this to sound like." I'm thinking about hearing a crackly recording of *Arirang* and trying to mesh that together with what each of them was bringing to the table, and I can understand the hesitation. This is kimchi at Paris Baguette.

Johnlocked: And that's what brought them around, though, to the album concept. I think it was Namjoon who said, "Seven men who have now done their own thing and we have very different tastes and we're trying to find what the common ground is, and really the one thing we could find is that we're all Korean." Looking at different K-pop groups, a lot of the members now are international; that was kind of more standard in previous years to have all the members be Korean, but that's not the case now. What sets them aside from the modern landscape of their musical peers is, "Yeah, I guess this is the thing that we have in common. We're all Korean, so maybe this concept will work for us. We can find a way to bring all of these seven disparate tastes together and have showcases for them within the context of the *Arirang* concept."

B: It shows. The album is very diverse.

Hosts: Yeah.

B: There's a fucking gong in the middle of it.

Hosts: Yeah.

Suspup: Putting the album together was so fast.

Hosts: Yeah, yeah.

SundayDuck: And they wrote a ton. Over a hundred songs.

Suspup: Yeah. I just think that they did the best they could. They had a deadline. They have a really, really hard deadline of putting that thing out and they did the best they could, and they still put out a banger of an album. Maybe it wasn't the quintessential masterpiece of their whole entire lives or whatever, but it was a really freaking good album. Bang PD called it and it works.

SundayDuck: I think, for me, just talking about the album in general: like any of my favorite movies, this album hits the same way for me where the more I listen to it, the more I discover. The more I hear, the more I pick up, and that makes it infinitely more interesting than some of the more bubblegum pop releases that they have had in the past. There's so many layers to this album and so many individually interesting, unique sounds -- literally, just cool sounds on the album -- that just make me so happy. First time I heard it, it was Mads and I when the album got released. We sat together in my living room and listened to it and we just kept looking at each other, and the first half of the album was not very melodic at all when you first hear it. It's very rap heavy and it's kind of rough in a way; it's not as melodic as previous albums. It was interesting, though, because we kept checking in with each other (Mads and I) and when those blade sounds start at the beginning of "Hooligan"...

B: Obsessed.

SundayDuck: She had a visceral (UGH!) reaction. She cringed and she did not like that sound at first; now, she loves it because we've checked in with each other and I'm like, "Yeah, I remember you were visibly like, 'UGH!'" and she's like, "That's one of my favorite things now." It just grows on you like all the best art does, I think. I'm growing to love every track on this album in some form or fashion. I haven't done a lot of lyric diving yet because I just consumed things very slowly. That's going to be my next step: to do more lyric dives, and then I know I'm just going to fall in love with another layer.

Johnlocked: And that's exactly what we're going to do next: a deep dive into the album, *Arirang*, track by track, so we can dig into the lyrics, music, and cultural context and fall deeper in love with this album as we explore its layers. So stay tuned for part two of Celebrating BTS Comeback, which will be releasing soon, and Happy Festa 2026.

MUSIC OUTRO (starts at 00:56:43)

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- **Show Intro and Outro** – BTS, Arirang: Body to Body