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“a dark and plodding swagger”

- **People.com** on “Cruel and “Blow”

People **EXCLUSIVE**

Jackson Wang Gets Candid About His 'No Filter' Solo Album and New Single: 'I'm in My Most Raw Form'

The K-pop star just released "Cruel," the second single off his forthcoming album *MAGIC MAN*



Jackson Wang is coming off the most difficult year and a half of his life — and opening up about the unfiltered album he has to show for it.

In January 2021, the singer and rapper, 28, and his bandmates in the K-pop group GOT7 parted ways with their record label, JYP, after more than seven years. And while the group has vowed to stick together (they just released new music in May), for Wang, it was the start of a tumultuous period of personal and professional uncertainty.

"I've been through so much, and I've had such a bad time for that past year and a half, struggling in work and life, and in my mental space," Wang tells PEOPLE. "But because of all that I finally got this album. So I appreciate it. It was a path that I had to go through and I'm happy that I did."

His forthcoming 10-song solo release, *MAGIC MAN*, is due out September 9, and he's already shared the first two singles from it: "Blow" and "Cruel." The latter dropped, along with a dark and demon-filled music video (above), on Friday.

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CREDIT: NABIL ELDERKIN

"It's bit of rock, a bit of grunge, a bit of pop. It's a mixture of everything," Wang explains of the gritty blend of styles on the album. Where "Cruel" and "Blow" have a dark and plodding swagger, the ironically named "Dopamine" is a melancholy breakup song and "All the Way" has a surf rock feel.

"A lot of [the album] is inspired by the process of me just trying to understand myself, understand my sound, understand my visuals, and what I really want to do. And I ended up here," he says.

But it's Wang's transparency that might shake fans most.

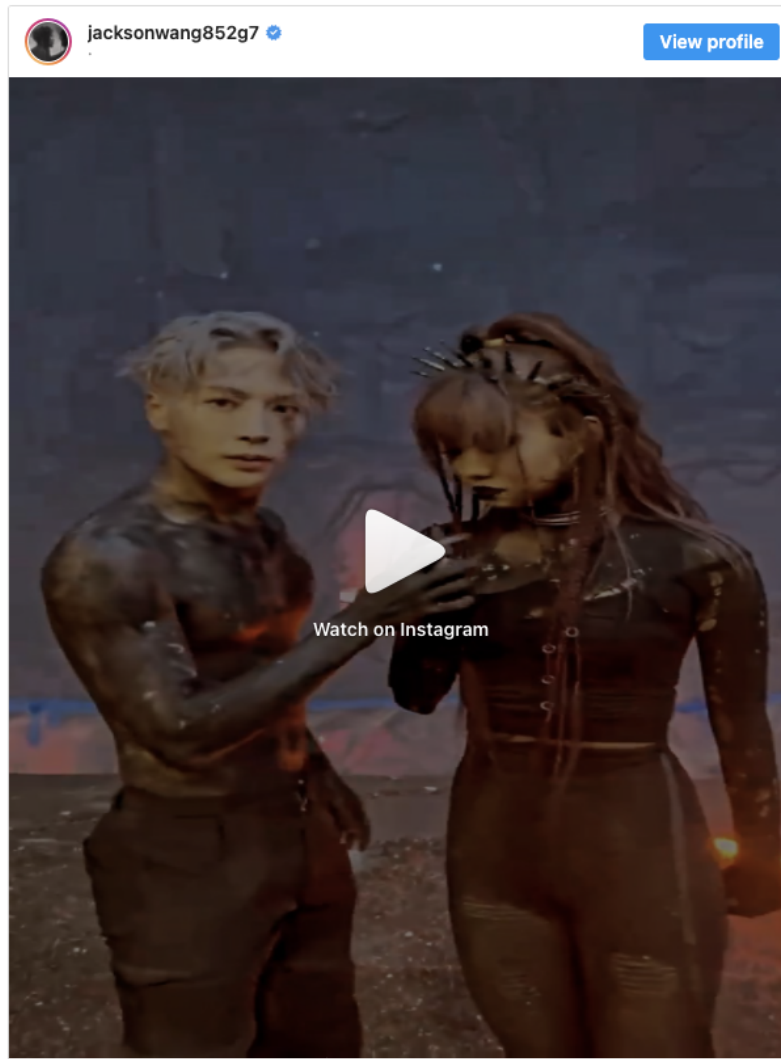
I think it's way more extreme than all the stuff that I've released in the past," he says. "And I think it's because on this album, I'm in my most raw form that I've ever been in my career as a solo artist, just not caring about whoever I was and whatever I had before. And [I] just want to go for being completely me and with no filter."



CREDIT: NABIL ELDERKIN

Wang has been candid about the recent difficulties he's faced, telling *Variety* in an April interview that in the past 18 months, he "was in a mental breakdown," experienced anxiety and depression and "started drinking every day." He also opened up on *The Kelly Clarkson Show* in May about how he's learned the importance of "talking to somebody" about his stresses.

Asked why he chose this moment to share this with his fans, he explains, "I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, so I want to live to the fullest today. I want to be completely honest to everybody, especially to the ones that love and support me. If I have one more chance to tell them, express how I feel, how much I love them, how much I appreciate them, or even have a moment of saying, 'It's okay to say I'm not okay.' Even that thought, I just want to express it one more time if I can."



Wang is no stranger to major risk taking. The Hong Kong native was on the path to becoming an Olympic fencer like his father (his mother was an Olympic gymnast), and was training for the London Summer Games before deciding to pursue music.

It took him 7 months to convince his parents to allow it, but the gamble clearly paid off. GOT7 debuted in 2014 and have released 5 studio albums and 16 EPs, while Wang became a superstar in Korea, China and abroad. He launched his own record label, TEAM WANG, in 2017 and expanded into fashion in 2020.

The performer, who is fluent in English, Korean, Mandarin and Cantonese, has been wooing even more American audiences of late, making recent appearances on the *Late Late Show with James Corden* and the YouTube series *Good Mythical Morning*. In April, he performed at the Coachella music festival in California, which he counts as a career highlight.

"I felt like, at that moment, right before I performed, I was like, 'I can die after this. If this is my last stage, I admit it, I would die happily.' I just wanted to give out everything that I had," he recalls.

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He also used the show as a platform to introduce new audiences to acts they might not encounter otherwise. "It's about actually being there to share with the world what's happening in the East. To the crowd here they might think it's fresh stuff, something that they've not seen. And as Chinese, as an Asian, I just felt like I really wanted to be there and showcase my people."

And the Jackson Wang musical diplomacy tour is just getting started. "I'm seeking a lot of performing opportunities, and that's all I care about," he shares. "Let me just travel around the world and meet everybody that might or might not know me, but let me just at least perform in front of them. Let me showcase that. I really want to go to South America, the Middle East, Europe, India, Southeast Asia, everywhere. I want to perform for earth. That's my goal."

MAGIC MAN is out September 9. "Blow" and "Cruel" are available to stream now.