

Station 1: Mitski, “Be the Cowboy”

In 2018, singer-songwriter Mitski released her fifth album Be the Cowboy. On The Daily Show with Trevor Noah, Mitski talked about the title of her album and its meaning to her as a Asian-American woman. Read the transcript below, and answer the following questions.

Trevor Noah: Welcome to the show. Congratulations on a new album. I’m dying to find out, what is the message you’re trying to get out with “Be The Cowboy? What are you trying to get people to do?

Mitski: Well, when I say cowboy, I don’t mean like the working cowboy of today, I literally mean like the cowboy myth. Like the Marlboro commercial cowboy where there’s like a white man leaning on a fence and squinting, or like Clint Eastwood riding into town. Like that kind of cowboy. There’s such an arrogance and a freedom to it that is so appealing to me, especially because I’m an Asian woman, and I think I have to walk into a room and have to apologize for existing. And I was so attracted to that idea of freedom and arrogance and not having to apologize. So this album, I think its protagonist is someone like me who feels like they want to channel or embody that energy of the cowboy.

Trevor Noah: Would you say that growing up for yourself culturally, is Asian culture the furthest thing from cowboy-ness? Is that like the complete opposite?

Mitski: Yeah I would say so.

Trevor Noah: Like you’ll kick down the doors and then you’ll be like, “sorry about that”?

Mitski: Yeah, I think the cowboy, the idea of the cowboy is so American, because the idea of a man riding into town, wrecking shit, and then walking out like he’s the hero. . .

(Laughter)

Trevor Noah: That’s the way life should be lived! I like that, “be the cowboy.” I want to be the cowboy, that sounds like fun.

Mitski: Yeah, exactly!





Questions:

Mitski clarifies that she means “not the working cowboy but the cowboy myth.” What characteristics does Mitski attribute to the myth of the cowboy?

Why are these attributes appealing to Mitski and/or her listeners who possess identities opposite of the media portrayal of the cowboy?