

Excerpt from "It just pours out of her": issues of authenticity in the music and stage performance of alternative rocker Mitski'.

University of Birmingham coursework (high 1st honour, 82/100)

Submitted to the Global Undergraduate Awards, 2019. Awaiting results.

Keighly offers a way into understanding how Mitski's performances, electronic and trained, can still be considered authentic. Just as positional authenticity works in binaries, Keighley pits modernist authenticity against romantic authenticity, the latter essentially being synonymous with folkloric authenticity. However, Keighley argues both to be authentic albeit under different measurements of authenticity. As he writes 'Romanticism believed in an organic, and even traditional, connection between the artist and audience' whereas 'Modernism embraced the chaos of the city and the aesthetic possibilities of the machine'. Though Mitski does not side with the economically oppressed, her background is often understood as siding with the racially and culturally oppressed. Hence, she occupies a space where her person and lyrics are read with folkloric authenticity whilst her music is read with modernist authenticity.

On stage, Mitski's earlier tours of Puberty 2 and Bury Me At Makeout Creek conform more to Folkloric authenticity. In these concerts, though her music may be modernist, her performance is of a singer-songwriter, even if a bit stoic. Take, for example, the song Happy from Puberty 2 and its performance at Boston Calling 2017. On the album, Happy is largely synthesized with the song's primary hook being a semiquaver ostinato on an unaccompanied synthesized drum. Over this, Mitski sings an unmetred, modal and heavily echoed melody. Musically a recitative, it borrows authenticity from classical music conventions which perceive such 'half-sung' sections as closer to human speech and therefore more 'real'. After the opening recitative, a solo is played by an odd electronic instrument that sounds half-way between an electric guitar and saxophone. The song's opening seems to be at odds with itself, amidst 'unnatural' instruments and a solo in an oddly happy major scale that clashes with the opening musical mode, Mitski's voice and performance appears as the only 'natural' object, even if it has filtered electronically.