



<http://takingstock.otdac.org>

Opening Times: The work you have developed for your commission is called *Taking Stock with Alice Theobald*, can you tell us where the title comes from?

Alice Theobald: *Taking Stock with Alice Theobald* is a stock music library made up of 21 instrumental pieces of music which I composed. People are invited to “take a stock” song by listening online, downloading for home-listening or purchasing for royalty-free use.

It’s also a play on the idiom “Taking stock” as in assessing or thinking about a situation before or after an event raising the question of how we use music, art, film and culture in general to measure it.

Stock music libraries still exist, but we’re of course living in a time when everything is sampled with or without permission. These songs, could now in theory go anywhere and take on different lives and meanings and exist in different contexts and scenarios outside of my control. There’s a question of authorship and the original (a question often sidestepped when we talk about stock music, plugins or any similar “off the shelf” creative filler), but there’s also a question of authorship related to experience and emotion – something I am continually trying to make sense of.

Most of the time we experience the big life events that are supposed to generate the big emotions through representations on TV, film and music before experiencing them first hand in person. Whether it’s through cartoon animals or pop stars, we are in a sense taught how to feel and behave through fictional or mediated characters from childhood. I have this constant feeling

and resentment that our lives are being sold back to us before with we have had a chance to live them and I believe that sound and its highly manipulative and affective potential plays a massive role in this. I think music it is accountable for a lot because it's so powerful on the senses. It is both useful and problematic probably on equal measures and I find this dichotomy fascinating.

OT: The tracks are ordered to suggest a narrative and the titles appear biographical - fictional premise for a song cycle or an autobiography? The whole narrative gets fragmented through the sale, license and purchase of the individual songs.

AT: The titles could be seen as suggestions for the sort of scenario for which they could be used. There is a loose narrative arc, but one that's formulaic and generic and where individual parts can be broken up and re-used elsewhere. The titles vary in specificity. They could be anybody's, everybody's and nobody's biography...

OT: How have you chosen to price and assign value to narrative fragments and associated emotions? Is this tied to any personal relationship or memory of them?

AT: The experiences and emotions they suggest are universal, but also vary from the day to day to the very rare (but then again I suppose this is to an extent subjective). I've loosely tried to price them so that the rarer the type of experience, the higher the price but there are some exceptions. For example *Caught their fiancé in bed with their second cousin that's half their age and just got back from a gap year traveling in the middle east* – because it's bombastic and felt right that it should be the cheapest.

OT: Aside from your artistic skills, did working in a band (Ravioli Me Away) affect your approach or insight into the project?

AT: Not consciously. I've always composed my own music and sound for my performances, videos, installations etc. *Taking Stock...* has actually probably been one of my most isolated projects in the making. I composed and recorded it on my own from my home studio in Huntingdon where I often go for weeks having had very little contact with anyone other than my

boyfriend (who I'd play the tracks to and get a second opinion on the emotions the songs evoked). In this case, I wouldn't say being in a band affected my approach to this project more than my experience of being or working with anyone else.

OT: The work seems to reference the kind of model and format of commercial self-help apps where you can select moods and emotions you wish to elicit. At the same time, set within this neoliberal structure, the titling of the tracks presents an individual and personal experience. Is this an opposition you're playing with and how do you think these relationships play out for music making and consumption in general?

AT: Music can function like that anyway. You might choose to listen to certain music to enhance a certain mood or to take you out of another. Psychological and mental states are so sensitive and malleable in this way. The website's architecture is designed to function as other existing stock music sites do and mimics their layout. These websites are so unashamedly crass in their function to capitalise on emotions with the intent on then selling a product, lifestyle or idea. I think that there is a complex question to be asked about the tensions between lived experience, cliché, and collective empathy and the ways in which received wisdom about life, love, death, aspiration, freedom and the human condition in general feed back into daily life through depictions in film, television, advertising, music as well as in online spaces.

There is a demand for authentic display, now more than ever. We desire it from arts and culture as much as we expect it from our politicians and news. But our society knows too well that where there is demand there is popularity and capital... so what happens when authenticity becomes something that's so self-conscious, performed and commodified? This search for authenticity, authentic display and what constitutes as authentic, is both what is driving me and what I am questioning and reacting to in my practice as a whole.

Taking Stock with Alice Theobald is an attempt to lay bare and unpick some of this in a demonstrative, more personal and questionably more "authentic" way.