

Chris Swithinbank — this line comes from the past

Somehow, by writing music, I am trying to figure out what people can do. Perhaps that seems a bit vague but I mean that I am interested in writing music that tells us something about what it means when a specific group of people are on stage. What can they do? What must they do? Why do they want to do that? What does it mean that they are doing it together? Why would you want to watch them?

The composer Carolyn Chen sometimes uses the term "music for people" to describe her work that is not "music for piano" or "music for string quartet." Composer and mrudangam artist Rajna Swaminathan also asks us to think of sound art as "an offering of resonance or vibration, in the context of a community that might find something familiar, of aesthetic value, or socially cohesive, in the gestures and sonorities presented." We might be tempted to think of music as some kind of universal vibration that we can all soak in, but instead music relies on a community, the people it is for.

Community sounds like a friendly word, warm, welcoming — tea and cake. But, of course, people don't get to be part of every community. A community can also be a wall or a locked door. Or a room that was never made to be comfortable for you. Music can rely on locking a door.

Can we do something to unlock a door? I don't know. What are we doing? Are we a machine? Are we a team? Are we changing the room? Are we a battalion? Are we an orchestra? Are we kind? Do we care? Can we hear what is on the other side of the wall? I'm not sure I can yet.

(Chris Swithinbank, 2018)