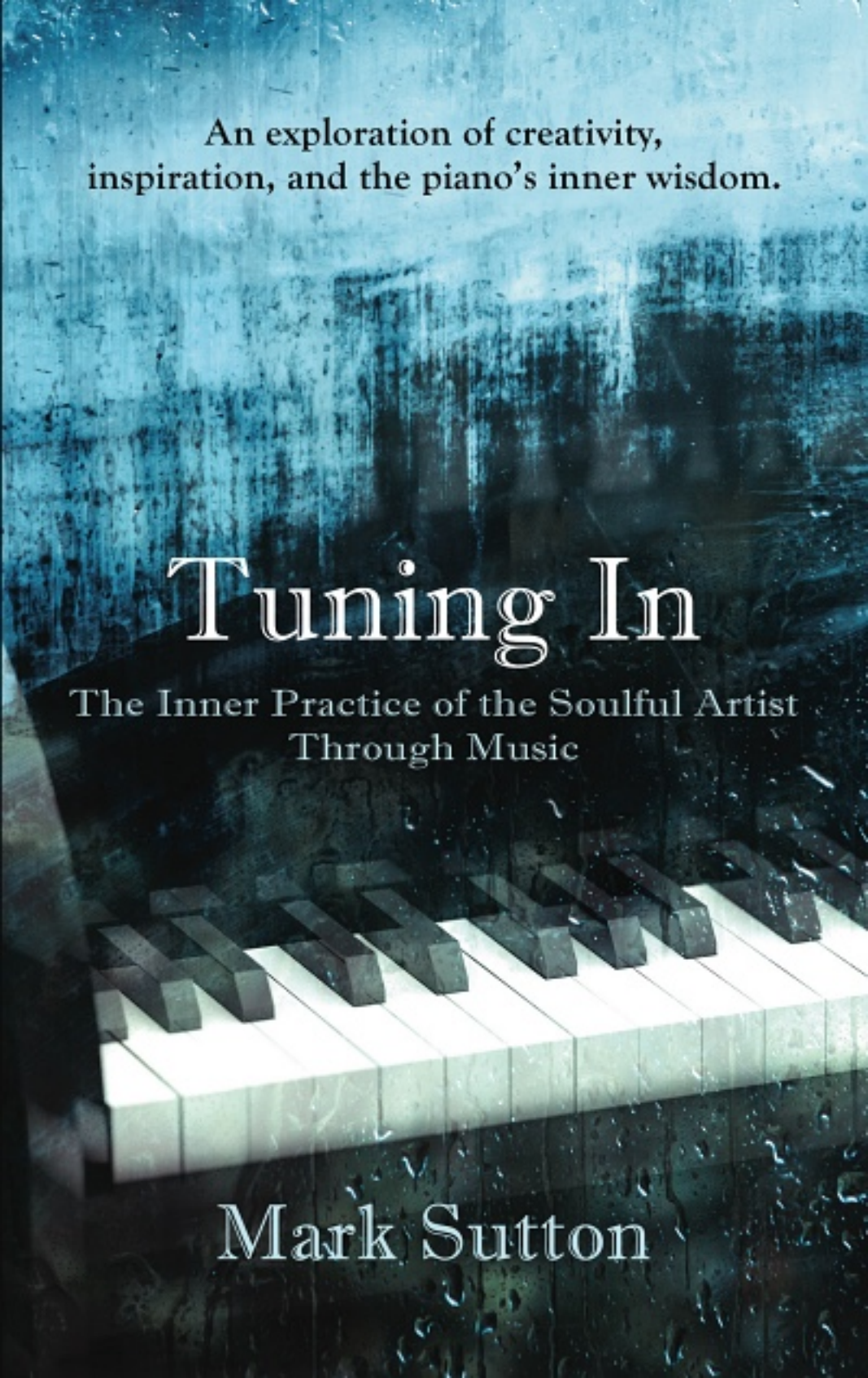


*A lyrical and philosophical memoir exploring music, memory, and meaning. Pianist Mark Sutton invites readers on a quiet journey through sound, silence, and the creative life.*

**Tuning In:**  
**The Inner Practice of the Soulful Artist through Music**  
By Mark Sutton

**Order the book from the publisher Booklocker.com**  
**<https://booklocker.com/books/14416.html?s=pdf>**  
**or from your favorite neighborhood**  
**or online bookstore.**



An exploration of creativity,  
inspiration, and the piano's inner wisdom.

# Tuning In

The Inner Practice of the Soulful Artist  
Through Music

Mark Sutton

Copyright © 2026 Mark Sutton

Print ISBN: 978-1-961266-10-0

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88532-278-2

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

BookLocker.com, Inc.

2026

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

Sutton, Mark

Tuning In: The Inner Practice of the Soulful Artist through Music  
by Mark Sutton

# Table of Contents

Introduction – A Boy and His Piano .....	1
Chapter 1 – First Notes.....	3
Chapter 2 – Why the Piano?.....	11
Chapter 3 – The Muse Appears .....	19
Chapter 4 – Finding a Voice.....	25
Chapter 5 – Between Discipline and Freedom .....	31
Chapter 6 – Moments of Wonder .....	39
Chapter 7 – Music as Memory .....	45
Chapter 8 – Forgetting and Remembering .....	51
Chapter 9 – Unfinished Works .....	59
Chapter 10 – Vulnerability .....	65
Chapter 11 – Silence.....	71
Chapter 12 – Companionship .....	75
Chapter 13 – The Feather and the Breath.....	79
Chapter 14 – Time’s Up .....	83
Chapter 15 – Never Finished.....	87
Chapter 16 – Resistance .....	91
Chapter 17 – Presence .....	95
Chapter 18 – Overcoming Yourself .....	103
Chapter 19 – Loss and Creation .....	109
Chapter 20 – The Hands.....	113

# Chapter 1 – First Notes

*“Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind,  
flight to the imagination, and life to everything.”*

—Plato

## The Spark of a Beginning

The first time I touched the piano, something stirred that I could not yet name. It was the spark of a beginning — a recognition that this strange arrangement of wood, felt, and strings held a world inside it. The piano echoed my inner state — my patience or distraction, my calm or restlessness. In this way, it showed me not only music but myself. Each return to the instrument carried its own excitement. To live this way is to understand that we are always beginners, always standing at the threshold of something we do not yet know.

My small fingers pressed the keys without understanding, yet even in those early notes, there was a kind of wonder. I sensed that the piano could speak, though I didn’t yet know its language. Each key was a door, each chord a landscape. I wanted to open them, one by one, to see where they might lead.

In our house growing up, we had a Boyd London piano. It was a British-made upright — simple, sturdy, and overstrung for a richer sound. It did the job well enough.

My first real memory of the piano is not of playing it well, but of being drawn to it, as though it was calling me. The keys were unfamiliar, even intimidating, but something about them promised more than just sound. I didn’t know why at the time — only that I wanted to press them, to hear

what would happen, to feel that vibration travel through the wood and into me. The instrument seemed to wait patiently for me, as if it had always been there, a quiet presence ready to receive my attention. And when I began to pay attention, I felt something awaken — not only in the piano but in myself. The first spark of music was also the first spark of self-discovery. At a young age, I knew this would mean more to me than any toy or playtime.

## **A World Opening**

Over time, the piano became more than an object; it became a companion. Sitting before it, I entered another world, a space where sound replaced speech and feeling could take shape. Each note was an opening, each melody a path into new terrain. At first, I felt overwhelmed. There were so many possibilities — scales, chords, rhythms, patterns. It was like standing at the edge of a vast landscape with no map. Yet instead of frightening me, the immensity was alluring. The piano invited exploration, not completion.

What I remember most from those early days is the sense of possibility. Even simple tunes felt like doorways. The sustain pedal seemed like magic — a shimmer of resonance that stretched the sound into something larger than itself.

I began to realise that music was not just about pressing the right keys. It was about listening — for the way the notes leaned into one another, the silences between them, and how they stirred something inside me. The piano became a vessel for whatever lived within me, amplifying thoughts and feelings I could not yet voice. Now, first notes remind me that beginnings are not small. They carry within them the whole journey — the promise, the mystery, the unfolding.

## **First Lessons**

Learning to play in those first days was less about instruction and more about discovery. Before scales or etudes, there was sound itself. I learned not by being told but by listening, imitating, and following curiosity. I didn't see each wrong note as failure but direction — it showed me where not to step, which path might open if I tried again.

I began piano lessons at the age of ten. My teacher was an elderly lady who lived across the road in a large, cold house. This was the early 1970s, when central heating wasn't yet common. Instead, she had an electric bar fire aimed directly at her for the entire lesson. That left me sitting in the chill, with a draught rising through the keys as I played.

Like many beginnings, it wasn't polished. My fingers stumbled, rhythms faltered, and I didn't understand structure. But the piano didn't seem to mind. It offered itself without judgment. Each note, however imperfect, gave me something back: a hint of beauty, a suggestion of possibility.

After only a few lessons, I discovered I could play by ear. Once I had the tune in my head, I didn't really need the music. I would pretend to glance at the score, not knowing where I was on the page, which annoyed my teacher immensely. She would cry out "No!" and lift my fingers off the wrong keys, plonking them down where she thought they should be. What struck me most was how immediate it felt. Other things in life required waiting, explaining, or permission. At the piano, I could play and hear the result instantly. Press a key — the sound is there. Hold it — the tone changes. Let go — silence. It was a conversation, even if I didn't yet understand the language.

Of course, this tutor-student relationship couldn't last. Eventually, she took me by the hand, walked me back across the road, and explained to

my parents that she could no longer teach me. I was still only ten years old. Yet even this rejection became part of the story. The piano itself had not turned me away; it remained, patient and ready, waiting for me to return.

The early lessons were not heroic. They were full of hesitations, missed notes, the awkwardness of small hands stretching for octaves too wide to reach. And yet, these moments contained something precious. Each simple piece, each stumbling attempt, carried with it the joy of finding out that sound could be shaped by me.

The discipline of practice introduced a new routine. To sit at the piano each day was to learn patience, repetition, and that progress comes quietly, almost invisibly. There were no sudden leaps into mastery, only small increments that slowly developed into skill. Looking back, I see that those early hours at the piano were also early lessons in how to approach life itself: with persistence, humility, and an understanding that real growth is the slow work of determination.

In time, those first notes began to feel like stepping stones across a river. One led to the next, sometimes securely, sometimes with a wobble. And though I couldn't see into the distance, I knew there was something on the other side worth reaching.

## **The Philosophy of Beginnings**

Philosophers remind us that beginnings are sacred. Seneca wrote that every new undertaking is a renewal of life, a chance to start again. Marcus Aurelius spoke of rising each day as an opportunity to live in harmony with nature. The piano taught me a similar truth, though in its own language. To touch the keys each time is to encounter the unknown. Nothing is certain, but within uncertainty lies hidden treasure. Those first



clumsy notes carried within them the seeds of all the music that would follow. I felt a need to honour possibility itself. The courage to start each new piece, to touch the keys for the first time, is to accept the grace of being a beginner.

## **The Piano as a Mirror**

The more I played, the more I realised that the piano was not separate from me. It mirrored my patience, impatience, and my focus or distraction. To begin playing was also to start seeing myself differently. The piano revealed every layer to me, one note at a time. The first notes were not only a pathway into music, but also a route to a deeper awareness of life itself.

## **The Gift of First Notes**

What I carry with me from those early encounters is gratitude. Gratitude for the spark, for the sense of wonder, for the way a simple sound could open an entire world within me. Even now, when I sit at the piano, I sometimes recall those early days. Those memories still shape how I play. They keep alive the sense that every time I touch the keys, something new can happen. Each day, each attempt, each gesture carries within it the possibility of discovery.

## **Sound and Memory**

The sounds from the piano do not vanish after I play them. They linger in the ether, echoing long after the vibration has faded. I often find myself replaying them in my mind, wondering at how a single note can hold so much presence. As I developed, these sounds became part of how I understood myself. Markers of a new language I was learning to speak

through my hands. I found that music entered not just through my ears but into my mind, shaping my thoughts and memory alike.

## **Childhood Wonder**

Children often discover the world through curiosity, and the piano was one of my first experiences of that. I was not conscious of practicing or achieving — I was simply playing, in both senses of the word. There was no division between seriousness and joy. The piano gave me permission to explore without fear. That childlike openness is something I try never to lose. Even now, I know that music emerges not in expertise but from curiosity. Every note can still feel like discovery when I allow myself to hear it with fresh ears.

## **Enduring Spark**

Looking back, what amazes me is not how little I knew, but how much was already innate within me. The seeds of everything — joy, frustration, discipline, discovery — were already there. Those early discoveries have carried me through years of playing, listening, and searching. Whenever I sit at the piano, that spark of curiosity is always there. Music is always calling me deeper into its mystery.

## **Closing Reflection**

Looking back, I see that what drew me to the piano was never just the music itself, but its sense of inclusion. Those early explorations held more than melody — they held the beginnings of a way of seeing, listening, and being. The piano did not just teach me how to play; it taught me how to pay attention, how to return, how to begin again with reverence instead of fear. Even now, every time I sit down to play, I am reminded that something sacred is about to unfold. Those early

childhood notes remain — not only in sound or memory, but as a way of moving through the world: open, curious, and alive to the quiet beauty of beginnings.

## Chapter 2 – Why the Piano?

*“The harmony of the world is made manifest in Form and Number, and the heart and soul of all creation is in musical harmony.”*

— Pythagoras

### Why the Piano?

It is a question I have asked myself many times: why the piano? Out of all the instruments, why this one? I sometimes wonder if it was the piano that chose me, rather than the other way around. Out of all the paths I could have taken, why was I drawn here — to this instrument, to this way of expressing myself? In truth, there weren’t that many paths. I wasn’t very academic at school, though I was good with my hands. I did well at Metalwork and eventually found a career in horticulture, but that is another story.

The piano is both simple and vast. Press a key, and you have a sound — immediate, certain, undeniable. Yet behind that one sound lies an entire universe of possibility. The piano contains an orchestra within it: bass lines as deep as a cello, chords that ring like brass, melodies that can sing as clearly as a voice. It is at once a single instrument and many instruments combined.

### The Democratic Instrument

There is something democratic about the piano. Every note is laid out in front of you, side by side, black and white, visible and equal. Unlike the violin or the flute, where much must be felt in muscle memory, the piano shows itself openly. You can see the distance between notes, the rise and

fall of melody, and the architecture of harmony. This visibility makes it an instrument of understanding as well as expression. Even before you can fully play, the keys invite you — a magnetic pull from the heart, yearning to create a sound that can be shaped into something capable of touching other people's hearts. The piano does not hide its secrets. It offers them in plain sight, asking only that you listen. Perhaps this is why it became my instrument. It offered me a landscape I could see and touch — a geography of sound. I could wander its plains of white keys, climb the sharp ridges of its black notes, stumble, retrace, and try again. Each attempt gave me a new path forward. More than that, it gave me purpose, awe, and the feeling that I was being guided — that I wasn't alone on this journey of exploration.

## **The Piano as Landscape**

The metaphor of geography has always stayed with me. The piano is a continent, and each time I sit before it, I embark on a journey across its expanse. The deep bass is an ocean, the high treble a mountain ridge. Chords form valleys and plains, while melodies are rivers that wind through them. To play the piano is to travel, and each piece is both a map and an adventure. Unlike other landscapes, this one shifts each time I return. The same piece played on a different day reveals a new horizon. The same chord, pressed with a different weight of emotion, opens into a different sky. The geography of the piano is alive, changing with the player who walks upon it.

## **The Piano as My Teacher**

The piano is also a companion unlike any other. It waits in silence until you sit down, and then it speaks the moment you touch it. There is no delay, no gap between thought and sound. A key pressed is a key heard. That immediacy felt like an invitation when I was young: a conversation

I could join even without knowing the language fully. And yet, the piano humbles you. Its breadth is enormous — eighty-eight keys, ten fingers, endless combinations. At first, it feels like too much to grasp, but in that immensity lies its gift. You can spend a lifetime with the piano and still not exhaust it. Every chord offers variations, every melody new harmonies, every silence new possibilities. The piano teaches patience and humility. It rewards persistence but never flatters. If you rush, it shows your haste. If you hesitate, it echoes your uncertainty. But if you give yourself fully, it responds with a generosity that feels infinite. It is a teacher without words, yet with lessons that shape more than music — lessons of discipline, of attention, of honesty.

## **Why Not Another Instrument?**

Why not another instrument? Perhaps I might have learned the violin, the guitar, or even chosen to sing. For starters, there was already a piano in the house, so I had a head start. But more than that, the piano offered itself without judgment. Even in awkward beginnings, it responded with dignity — a shimmer of sound that hinted at what could be.

Other instruments ask for different things. The violin demands intonation so precise that the beginner's sound can be painful. The guitar leaves fingers raw and blistered before they can glide with ease. The voice is the most personal of instruments, yet it leaves one exposed in ways that can feel daunting. The piano, by contrast, gave back beauty even to my earliest attempts. A simple chord, struck with sincerity, resonated with dignity. The piano seemed to meet me where I was and lift me beyond myself.

## **Philosophical Reflection**

Philosophers have often sought metaphors for life in music. Marcus Aurelius spoke of harmony as the natural order of the cosmos. Seneca wrote that life, like music, must be tuned to the right pitch. For me, the piano embodied these truths in tangible form. Each key was part of a greater whole. Each sound found its meaning not alone, but in relation to others. In this sense, the piano became more than an instrument. It was a model of order and possibility. It taught me that clarity is not the absence of complexity, but the integration of many voices into one chorus. The eighty-eight keys are finite, yet their combinations are infinite. So it is with life: our days are limited, yet what we can make of them is boundless.

## **The Gift of the Piano**

In the end, the piano became the place where music and I first met, and where we have returned ever since. It is not just an instrument, but a world. In choosing it — or in being chosen by it — I found not only a way into music, but also a way into myself. It remains my truest form of expression. What I cannot put into words has always found its voice in music. The piano gave me a language when I had none. It gave me structure when life felt uncertain. It gave me a way to listen, a way to speak, a way to be. And it continues to give. Even now, after years of playing, it offers new landscapes, new questions, new beginnings. The piano feels inexhaustible, as life itself is inexhaustible. In that sense, it has always held my answer to the question: why the piano?

## **The Physical Presence of the Piano**

The piano is not only sound, but presence. It fills a room with its size and weight. To sit before it is to feel the breadth of wood, ivory, and steel

surrounding you. The instrument seems both monumental and intimate, a piece of furniture that somehow breathes. Its lid can be closed, making it silent and still, but when opened, it reveals a world of resonance. The act of sitting down at the piano is already a kind of ritual. The bench becomes a threshold, a doorway into another space. The body adjusts, the hands hover, and something shifts internally — an awareness that what follows might change the atmosphere of the room, or even the mood of the day. The piano commands respect simply by being there, waiting, steady and patient, until touched.

## **The Piano and Emotion**

No other instrument has given me the same range of emotional voice. On the piano, joy can be as light as a dancing scale, sorrow as deep as a rolling bass, and longing as unresolved chords that ache for resolution. The instrument contains an entire emotional palette, from the most delicate whisper to the most thunderous storm. It is this range that has always drawn me. The piano does not limit expression to a narrow band. It allows me to move between contrasts quickly, even within the same piece — to shift from stillness to motion, from order to chaos, from light to shadow. The piano reflects the complexity of human feeling, and in doing so, it helps me to understand my own heart more clearly.

## **The Piano's First Call**

In the beginning, the piano was simply there, a quiet presence in the room long before I understood what it might become. I remember being drawn to it without knowing why, as if its stillness held a kind of invitation. Before I learned chords, before I could make anything resembling music, I sensed that touching the keys connected me to something beyond



myself. Even the earliest notes, uneven and hesitant, seemed to carry a feeling I couldn't yet name.

It wasn't yet a companion; it was a curiosity, a pull, a voice calling through sound. I didn't always know what I was looking for when I sat at the bench, only that something inside me softened, or sharpened, or opened when I did. The piano felt like a doorway into a world both intimate and vast. Looking back, those early moments were the first call: not dramatic, not clear, but persistent. A sense that this instrument and I were beginning a long conversation, one that would shape much of my life without me quite realising it.

## **Order and Freedom**

The piano is a paradox. On the one hand, it is the most structured of instruments. The keys are arranged in perfect order, symmetrical, predictable. There is no mystery in where the notes are placed. Everything is visible, laid out clearly, evenly spaced. And yet, within that order, freedom flourishes. The combinations are endless, the possibilities inexhaustible. The piano teaches that structure is not limitation, but foundation. Just as language uses letters and words to create poetry, the piano uses its keys to create music. The framework is stable, but the expression is infinite. This balance of order and freedom has shaped not only how I play, but how I see life itself.

## **Closing Reflection**

In the end, the question 'Why the piano?' is one I cannot fully answer. The reasons are many: its presence in my home, its clarity and democracy, its vastness and intimacy, its ability to carry emotion, its companionship, its balance of order and freedom. But beneath all of these, there is a mystery. Perhaps it was simply the right instrument for

me, the one that resonated with my soul. The piano remains where I first met music, and where I continue to meet it still. It is not just an instrument, but a world — a geography, a teacher, a mirror, a companion. Whatever path life has taken, the piano has been there, steady and waiting. And whenever I return, it greets me not as a stranger but as an old friend. This is why the piano, and not another. Because it has become inseparable from who I am.

## Chapter 3 – The Muse Appears

*“At the touch of love, everyone  
becomes a poet.”*

— Plato

### When Music Plays Me

There are days when the piano feels like a familiar companion, steady and unchanging. I sit, I play, and the music responds in predictable ways. But then there are days when something entirely different happens. A phrase arrives that I cannot explain. A melody unfolds beneath my hands, as though it had been waiting all along. In those moments, I know I am not alone. I call this presence “the muse.”

It is not a figure I can summon at will, but an experience that arrives suddenly, like weather. I might sit at the piano expecting nothing, resigned to scales or half-finished sketches, when suddenly the room shifts. Notes fall into place without effort. I am playing, yet it feels more accurate to say I am being played. The experience is hard to describe to anyone who has not felt it. Time stretches, and the usual boundaries between myself and the instrument dissolve. My hands feel guided. The melody seems to breathe on its own.

There is joy, but also awe — the sense that something far larger than me is speaking in a language I can barely keep up with. I remember one evening in particular. I had no intention of writing anything; I was simply passing the time, improvising without thought. Then, as I was about to leave the piano, a sequence of chords began to unfold. They had weight, inevitability. I followed them, and a melody rose over the top like light breaking through clouds. I didn’t think; I simply moved. When I stopped,

the silence was almost unbearable. I knew I had touched something that belonged to me, and yet did not belong to me at all.

The muse, for me, is not about perfection. Often what arrives is fragile, unfinished, like a sketch on the edge of fading. But the feeling is unmistakable: the sense of being a vessel. The old mystics spoke of it — Hildegard of Bingen described herself as “a feather on the breath of God.” I don’t claim such grandeur, but I understand the image. When the muse appears, I am lifted, carried, moved by a current I cannot see.

I have learned not to chase these moments. The more I try to grasp them, the quicker they vanish. Instead, I try to create conditions: regular time at the piano, patience, and an openness to listen. Sometimes nothing happens, and that too is part of the process. But every so often, the air shifts, and I find myself caught in the flow again. The muse appears rarely, unpredictably, but her presence is what keeps me at the piano. It is the promise that something beyond practice, beyond knowledge, beyond myself, can still arrive. And when it does, I remember why I began this journey at all.

## **The Space Between Notes**

What I’ve come to understand is that inspiration doesn’t always arrive as sound. Sometimes, it arrives in silence — in the long, suspended moments where no notes come, and I am left simply listening. At the piano, these moments can feel unnerving. I sit in stillness, fingers hovering, unsure whether the next note will appear. But over time, I’ve begun to value these silences not as absences, but as thresholds. The space between notes is not empty; it is charged with possibility. Something is always forming there, even if I can’t yet hear it. There are days when I don’t play a single phrase worth remembering — just pauses, half-ideas, fragments that fall away. But I’ve learned that these

“unproductive” days are often clearing a path. They prepare the way for something to emerge later, subtly shaped by all the waiting that came before. I no longer rush to fill these spaces. I try to listen inside the silence — not with expectation, but with openness. The muse may arrive in a flood, or she may speak in a whisper just loud enough for one note to follow another. Both require the same attention. This is one of music’s quiet teachings: the importance of restraint. That what is not played can matter just as much as what is. That tension, space, and waiting are part of the composition. That sometimes the truest thing I can do is pause — and trust that something will rise in the quiet.

## **The Mystery of Inspiration**

Inspiration has always been described in metaphors: as a wind, a light, a tide, a fire. Each image captures something of its essence, but none captures it fully. For me, the muse is most often like weather: unpredictable, changing, beyond my control. I cannot demand sun, but I can step outside and feel its warmth when it shines. When the muse arrives, I do not feel ownership. Instead, I feel as if I am borrowing from something larger, a current of sound that passes through me for a time. It is a reminder that music does not originate in me alone, but in something beyond me — call it mystery, call it spirit, call it the collective unconscious. Whatever the name, it speaks, and I try to listen. This is why inspiration humbles as much as it uplifts. It reminds me that I am both limited and limitless — limited in control, limitless in possibility. The muse appears as gift, never as possession, and my task is simply to be ready.

## **Discipline and Grace**

There is always a tension between discipline and grace. Without discipline, the muse finds no ground to land on. Without grace, discipline

becomes lifeless. To practice scales is necessary, but it is not enough. To wait for inspiration is also necessary, but it is not enough. The two must meet. The hours of practice are like preparing the soil. The muse is like the rain. One without the other leaves the field barren. I have come to see practice not as a guarantee but as an offering. Each time I sit at the piano, I offer my attention, my patience, my willingness. Sometimes nothing grows, but sometimes, unexpectedly, the muse waters what I have prepared, and life springs up.

## **Absence and Longing**

There are long stretches when the muse does not appear. In those times, I am tempted to despair, to feel abandoned. But even absence has its place. The waiting teaches patience, and the longing itself sharpens my attention. When the muse finally returns, the joy is doubled, for it comes after thirst. Absence teaches me that inspiration is not the foundation of music; discipline is. If I only played when I felt inspired, I would play rarely. But because I play regularly, inspiration has somewhere to find me. The muse may vanish, but music remains, and in music I find enough to continue.

## **The Human and the Beyond**

The muse also reveals something profound about being human. We are not self-contained. Our greatest moments often feel as though they come from outside us. Plato called this divine madness. Others call it genius, or grace, or flow. Whatever the name, it reminds us that we are participants in something greater than ourselves. To make music is to step into that greater current, to be carried for a while. It is to acknowledge that creation is not only human effort but also human receptivity. The muse makes clear that art is not ownership, but participation. We do not control it; we join it.

## **Closing Reflection**

The muse arrives without warning, like a guest who never announces her visit. But her presence is what keeps me returning to the piano. She reminds me that music is not only craft but mystery — not only labour, but grace. I do not wait passively, but I do wait hopefully. Each day at the piano is an invitation, a possibility. The muse may come or not, but the act of sitting, listening, preparing, is already worthwhile. And when she does come, time opens, and I glimpse for a moment the vastness that music holds. This is why I play: not to master, not to control, but to listen for that feather on the breath, to be carried when the air shifts. The muse is never mine, but I am hers, and that is enough.

## **Tuning In – Companion Track**

As I wrote this book, a quiet spark began forming — not yet a melody, not yet a piece, just an inner inclination that music would eventually grow from the same place these words came from.

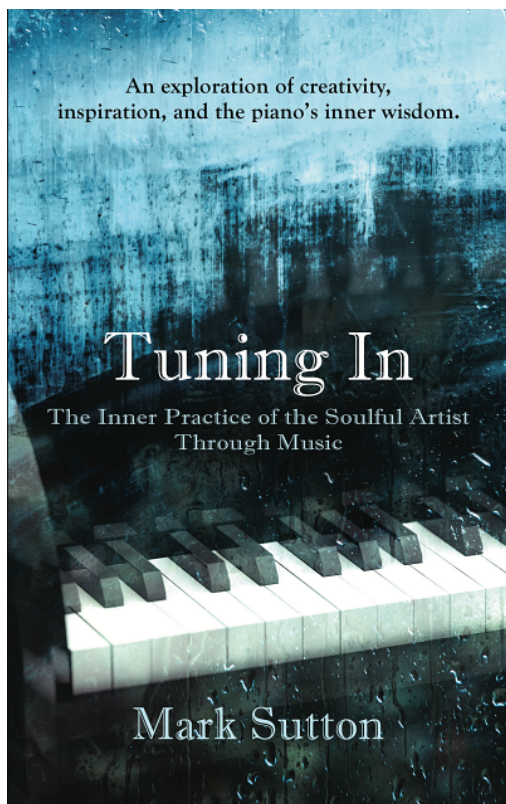
The track “Tuning In” will be born when the time is right, emerging from the stillness and the creative space this book explores.

When it arrives, you’ll find it here:

If you feel drawn to hear some of my musical work, simply scan the QR code — the webpage will guide you to the links.







*A lyrical and philosophical memoir exploring music, memory, and meaning. Pianist Mark Sutton invites readers on a quiet journey through sound, silence, and the creative life.*

**Tuning In:**  
**The Inner Practice of the Soulful Artist through Music**  
By Mark Sutton

**Order the book from the publisher Booklocker.com**  
**<https://booklocker.com/books/14416.html?s=pdf>**  
**or from your favorite neighborhood**  
**or online bookstore.**