

## **2019 Valerie Stark**

**Valerie Stark** is a musician and teacher who wears many hats. She relishes the variety that her career offers as a piano and voice teacher, choral and instrumental collaborator, worship leader, and most recently, song leader for adults living with Alzheimer's and dementia. Valerie has been a member of the Massachusetts Music Teachers Association since 1983, serving as Vice President of Membership in the 80s, and Treasurer from 2013-2018. She is currently Treasurer of the Boston Alumni Chapter of the music fraternity Mu Phi Epsilon.

Valerie is a highly sought-after collaborative pianist and frequently accompanies instrumentalists, vocalists, and choirs. She recently had the privilege of working with renowned clarinetist Katsuya Yuasa, winner of the Mu Phi Epsilon 2017 International Competition. Valerie has worked as the Wellesley Middle School Choral Accompanist for the past fifteen years. The choir program, under the direction of Lauren Connors, regularly performs original arrangements, and Valerie is challenged to improvise accompaniment parts to enhance the music. Valerie has also been involved as a collaborator and mentor to students in the Natick High School Honors Band and Chorus program since its inception in the early 1990s.

Valerie always wanted to be a piano teacher and has taught for nearly 45 years, primarily from her home studio. Her studio encompasses students of a variety of ages and levels— currently from 6 to 97 years of age! Valerie has a personalized teaching approach and designs her instruction for each student based on their individual learning style and level of musical development. Her goal as a music teacher is to help students develop musical skills and appreciation that will enrich them throughout their lives.

About 20 years ago, Valerie became a student of Estill Voice Training, which uses body awareness and mindfulness to give vocalists the skills and confidence to respond to challenges that they may encounter both in performance and in daily life. She recently began offering vocal lessons in her studio and brings the same “whole musician” approach to her singers, emphasizing music reading and theory as well as exploring vocal technique and repertoire with her students.

In addition to teaching and performing, Valerie enjoys using her musical skills to serve the community. She is a worship leader at her church, along with her husband Jeff, who is a vocalist. She has dedicated many hours to arranging music, rehearsing with various teams of musicians, and mentoring young musicians at the church. Valerie recently became aware of Alzheimer's disease through the loss of her mother, and she now visits a memory unit twice a month to bring singalong programs to the residents. This experience has brought moments of great joy,

Valerie began piano study at a young age in her hometown of Akron, OH, enthusiastically earning six plastic composer busts for memorizing 120 pieces in the first three years. She had the privilege of studying early on with Mrs. Johnson, who played piano on the radio and taught Valerie how to harmonize melodies and how to stand up straight and clearly introduce her pieces. Valerie has a great appreciation for her teachers in the years following as well, including Marian Jersild Lott (Akron University, OH), Dr. C. Nolan Huizenga (Houghton College, NY), Edith Stearns Trask (Boston University, MA), and Maria Clodes Jaguaribe (Boston University, MA).