

Honoring Hazzan Davidson



Each June, we mark the end of the synagogue's program year. Events wind down. We anticipate the restfulness of summer.

The new year that will start in the fall is but a wisp on the distant horizon. This year, June also marks the eve of Hazzan Charles S. Davidson's retirement as *Hazzan* of Congregation Adath Jeshurun, a position he has held with love and distinction for thirty-eight years. It is the month when we will join together to pay tribute, express

admiration, and demonstrate appreciation for all he has given to AJ and its members during these years. It is a time for wishing him and Frances blessings of happiness as they begin a new stage in their lives.

In the new edition of the *Seder Avodah Mahzor* which we will have ready for the High Holy Days, I have included the traditional prayer of the Hazzan, *Hinine*, which introduces the *Musaf Service* on *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*. It is the poignant prayer of an individual humbled by the daunting task of representing the congregation before God on the holiest of days. In one of its most touching lines, the Hazzan prays, "Accept my pleading as if the prayer had come from someone of outstanding character, whose voice is sweet, and who is seen by all as a friend."

No better words could describe the role Hazzan Davidson has played as our *Shalich Tzibbur*, the Representative of the Congregation in Prayer before God. He is a man of outstanding character, his voice is sweet and filled with devotion, and he has become a friend to all.

In thirty-eight years, Hazzan Davidson has led our prayers, taught our children, shared in our simchas, and comforted us in times of illness and bereavement. His presence has brought reassurance and strength. Moreover, he has introduced the congregation to the riches of his musical, lyrical soul. His compositions have elevated our spirits as they raised our awareness of the history of our people, and the challenges we face today.

Through the leadership of the Bernstein Torah Reading Academy, which he initiated, he is responsible for hundreds, even thousands, of young people and adults learning to love the reading and teaching of the Torah.

In liturgy, Hazzan Davidson is committed to preserving the authenticity of the musical nusah of the service. At the same time, he has recast it through his own compositions and style of prayer leadership in ways that make it accessible to a contemporary congregation like ours, yearning to participate in davening, but needing help to make it our own. Moreover, he has blended the music from Rabbi Klein's era, his own compositions and nusah to make what could have been a checkerboard of pieces, into a vibrant, seamless symphony.

Hazzan Davidson is recognized as a preeminent composer for the contemporary synagogue, and his influence extends far beyond Elkins Park. He is a master teacher of *hazzanim* at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, where he is chairman of the faculty of the H. R. Miller Cantorial School and College of Jewish Music.

I knew of Hazzan Davidson long before I met him. When I was growing up in Rochester, New York, Hazzan Samuel Rosenbaum, of blessed memory, who was the cantor of our congregation and who had a great personal influence on me, would often use Hazzan Davidson's compositions during our late Friday night services. When I came to AJ, I already knew many of the staples of our liturgy, having grown up on them.

For the last twenty-six years, we have shared the pulpit at AJ. It is hard to believe that the time has flown by so quickly. Through the years, I have learned much from him, and appreciated his friendship and collegiality. He has been friend, colleague and teacher. Davening with him has been an uplifting experience. The sweetness of his voice, and its lyrical quality, the precision of his Hebrew pronunciation, and the faith that his davening represents have been treasures for me as well as for all AJ members.

In honoring Hazzan Davidson, we join with his cherished family that shares his love of music and Judaism. His beloved wife Frances, who, for many years sang in and conducted our Choir, taught in our religious school, and conducted the AJ Choral Society; their children Miriam, Michael, Alyssa, and Ilana; Alyssa's husband David Arms, and their daughter Kaitlyn — their love sustains him and each other.

We give thanks for the Hazzan's thirty-eight years at AJ. His influence upon us will never cease; our friendship will continue unbroken. We pray that God will bless him and his family with life and joy, and provide him with continuing opportunities to serve the Jewish world with his gifts of spirit and soul.

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