



# From Our Lips ...

## Celebrating Synagogue Music



### Report on **Richmond Synagogue Service** Shabbat, 24 February 2024



Richmond Synagogue, (a constituent of the United Synagogue) presented a service on 24 February for the Festival Celebrating Synagogue Music. As you can see, in the picture above, they have a modern building, all on one level. It was opened in 1987, though a Jewish community had been in the area since around 1900.



Read more of the fascinating [History](#)). It has the layout of an orthodox shul with a readers' platform or bimah in the middle of the room (left in the picture with seats on either side facing it and a few pews also in front of it facing the Aron Kodesh ((in the centre of the back wall). For a service the pews furthest from us in the picture, are designated for women, who sit behind the 'token' metal screen.

The current community has about 200 members. Their new young Rabbi, Chaim Golker a Behavioural Psychologist, appointed in 2022 (and previously head of the Cheder) is very keen on music. He and his wife Rebbetzin Gila Golker are warm and responsive to their flock. Richmond, is an active community with several activities going on every week for adults and children. The service started at about ten o'clock with Rabbi Gulker on the Bimah holding his one-year-old baby in his arms, creating the warm and relaxed atmosphere in the shul for Shabbat. Few children were present at the service apart from the Rabbis children.



For the ECA's 'From Our Lips ...' initiative, the Richmond Jewish Community had invited a guest Cantor, **Rabbi Samuel de Beck Spitzer**, who was known from his Brighton days by Richmond members Alex and Tricia Brummer. They had advertised this widely amongst their community and friends, and were pleased to see that attendance was at least twice the norm for a Shabbat in February. Of the 27 men present, it was estimated that at least 14 were not regular attenders and some of the 28 women present, told me that had come specially for the musical service.



**Rabbi Samuel de Beck Spitzer** has French and Indian-Iraqi Jewish heritage and grew up in both the Sephardic and Chasidic communities of Stamford Hill. As well as rabbinic studies in the UK and Israel, Rabbi Samuel studied music in London and Manchester gaining distinctions in piano and voice and has performed in operas. Before becoming rabbi of the Hove Hebrew Congregation in 2017, Rabbi Samuel led the Lisbon Jewish community. In 2023 he joined the RAF as a Jewish Chaplain.

He has a warm personality and was really pleased to have been invited and welcomed to Richmond so kindly for the whole weekend. He has a commanding presence and his rich baritone voice more than filled the small space. Though the members plus the Rabbi do well, singing every Shabbos, the difference was striking having a ‘real chazan’ for a change. People really paid attention. Though he might not even have sung as much as they usually do, his renderings of familiar melodies for *Mi Kamocha*, *Kedusha* and *Venucho Yomar* really hit home.

The chanting of the Torah portions according to the ancient, notated melodies, was expertly delivered by a regular, Hirsh Cashdan, and the Haftorah was chanted by another key member Alex Brummer. Invited to say a few words to the congregation, Rabbi Spitzer stressed how important music was for children and adults – going so far as to say that compulsory at school should be English, Maths and Music!

Richmond Chairman, Paul Lawrence is also very musical, and he harmonised with colleague Jon Katzauer, in support of Rabbi Spitzer, both on the Bimah and at the Ark (as they do regularly with Rabbi Golker).

After the service the community mingled at a sumptuous Kiddush, which included, besides the usual Jewish delicacies of herring and bridge rolls, some vegetable spring rolls and curry balls.

They were pleased with the outcome and talked about what they might do next year – and indeed how in the meantime they might encourage post barmitzvah boys and other younger members of the community to sing parts of the services.

**Report by Geraldine Auerbach MBE**, London February 2024.

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More about Richmond Synagogue on their website [Richmond Synagogue](https://richmondsynagogue.org.uk/)

**Friday 23 February** at 7.00pm and **Saturday 24 February** at 10.00am.  
**Richmond synagogue**, Lichfield Gardens, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 1AP,  
Tel: 020 8940 3526 (07741 801292)  
<https://richmondsynagogue.org.uk/>



**Full Festival programme of services and concerts ECA Website** [www.cantors.eu](http://www.cantors.eu)