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UCT honours renowned Cape ballet master at its summer graduation



Johaar Mosaval

Photo: Brenton Geach

The University of Cape Town (UCT) will as part of its tradition bestow high academic honour, DMus (honoris causa), on renowned Cape Town ballet master Johaar Mosaval during the Faculty of Humanities virtual graduation ceremony scheduled for Monday, 13 December at 19:30.

This honour will be part of the virtual [December Graduation](#) ceremonies taking place on 13 and 14 December 2021, where hundreds of students who have toiled very hard to complete their qualifications across six faculties of the university will be honoured.

It is during these ceremonies that the university traditionally pays homage to distinguished individuals who have contributed immensely to the development of society at large. Mosaval is one of those people.

Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, UCT Vice-Chancellor, said: "It is an absolute delight for the university to be honouring a person of Mosaval's stature.

"There is no doubt about the immense contribution made by Mosaval to ballet and to community empowerment. He performed at the highest levels, both at home and abroad, contributed fresh perspectives to the medium, and broke colossal social barriers along the way. He is highly respected within the dance performance community locally and internationally."

Mosaval was born in District Six, Cape Town in 1928. His ambition from a very early age to become a famous ballet dancer was unheard of in the Muslim community of the time. After involvement in gymnastics at school and pantomimes in the Cape Town City Hall, he began private ballet classes with Jasmine Honoré. He was later introduced to Dulcie Howes, pioneer and doyenne of ballet in South Africa, who offered him the opportunity to train for three years at the UCT Ballet School.

Access to the study of ballet was extremely limited for persons defined as "coloured" under apartheid, and the challenges to succeed in this intensive art making process were many. With the assistance of friends and the Muslim Progressive Society, Mosaval left South Africa to take up a place in the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet Company in England. He followed this ground-breaking achievement with a quick rise to the rank of soloist in 1956, principal dancer in 1960, and finally senior principal dancer of the Royal Ballet by 1965.

After 25 years as senior principal dancer, Mosaval became one of the first dancers to enrol for a Professional Dance Teaching Diploma at the Royal Academy of Dance, which enabled him to open a ballet studio when he finally returned to South Africa. Mosaval was a strong advocate for the study of ballet in local schools, particularly those located in "coloured" townships.

At this time, Mosaval was also the Inspector of Ballet for the Administration of Coloured Affairs. It should be noted that very few people, regardless of colour, had his expertise in his field, and he had become a pioneer and a leader as well as a teacher. His role in the administration showed great bravery and contributed to the raising of standards. UCT could also be said to have been inspired by Mosaval to develop a more inclusive approach to dance. Furthermore, his work facilitated the entry into the school in 1981 of its current, and first, black director.

Over the course of his career, Mosaval has been the recipient of many awards, including the Winston Churchill Award (1975), Queen Elizabeth II Gold Jubilee Medal (1977), Western Cape Arts, Culture and Heritage Award (1999), Western Cape Province Premier's Commendation Certificate (2003), Cape Tercentenary Foundation Molteno Gold Medal (2005) and the Arts and Culture Trust Lifetime Achievement Award for Dance (2016). Most recently, he was presented with the Order of Ikhamanga in Gold by President Cyril Ramaphosa in March 2019.

- [Read more about Johaar Mosaval.](#)
- [Read the VC Desk on the December 2021 graduation celebrations.](#)

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