

Johaar Mosaval honoured at Artscape Opera

 By [Debbie Hathway](#)

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Every once in a while, a theatre production comes along that blows expectations out of the water - for artists and audience alike. In this case, it was *Dreaming Dance in District Six - the Johaar Mosaval Story* that was staged at the Artscape Opera in Cape Town recently.



Dreaming Dance in District Six – the Johaar Mosaval Story. Image by Jeremeo Le Cordeur

Never have I seen people clamouring for programmes after the final curtain call like I did on opening night. Many of us expected to be able to buy one at interval, but the show ran straight through for about 90 minutes leaving people empty handed without a keepsake from this momentous occasion.

However, the memory of the rapturous applause for the performers and directors who honoured the living legend himself, the 95-year-old Johaar Mosaval who joined them onstage, will endure. Why can't we see performances like this more often? The sheer joy of watching young artists dancing their hearts out alongside a few esteemed professionals is worth its weight in gold.



Johaar Mosaval, aged 95. Image by Jac de Villiers

Directors Basil Appolis and Grant van Ster draw on vast experience to get the best out of what they term “burgeoning South African talent”, well supported by a production team inspired by Mosaval’s self-narrated story of perseverance, tenacity and hope.

The eldest of 10 children, he was born in District Six in 1928. Mosaval was the first Black dancer at the University of Cape

Town (thanks to Dulcie Howes), what was to become the Royal Ballet in London and the Nico Malan Theatre (now Artscape Theatre Centre). His illustrious career, which featured key roles as Puck in *The Dream*, Bootface in *The Lady and The Fool*, and Jasper in Sir Arthur Sullivan's *Pineapple Poll*, led to his performances on stages worldwide to adoring fans.

The highlight, however, was performing in London at the coronation of Elizabeth II in front of all the key political and royal figureheads of the time. In fact, he soon became the Queen Mother's favourite. Would he do it all again? Absolutely.



Sebastian van der Berg as the young Johaar Mbsaval. Image by Gustav Klotz

“His extraordinary career with the Royal Ballet, brushing shoulders with some of the greats of his era, and where roles were created especially for him, is finely etched in ballet's history. His talent, hard work, dedication and, above all, humility, made him an extraordinary artist,” said Dr Eduard Greyling.

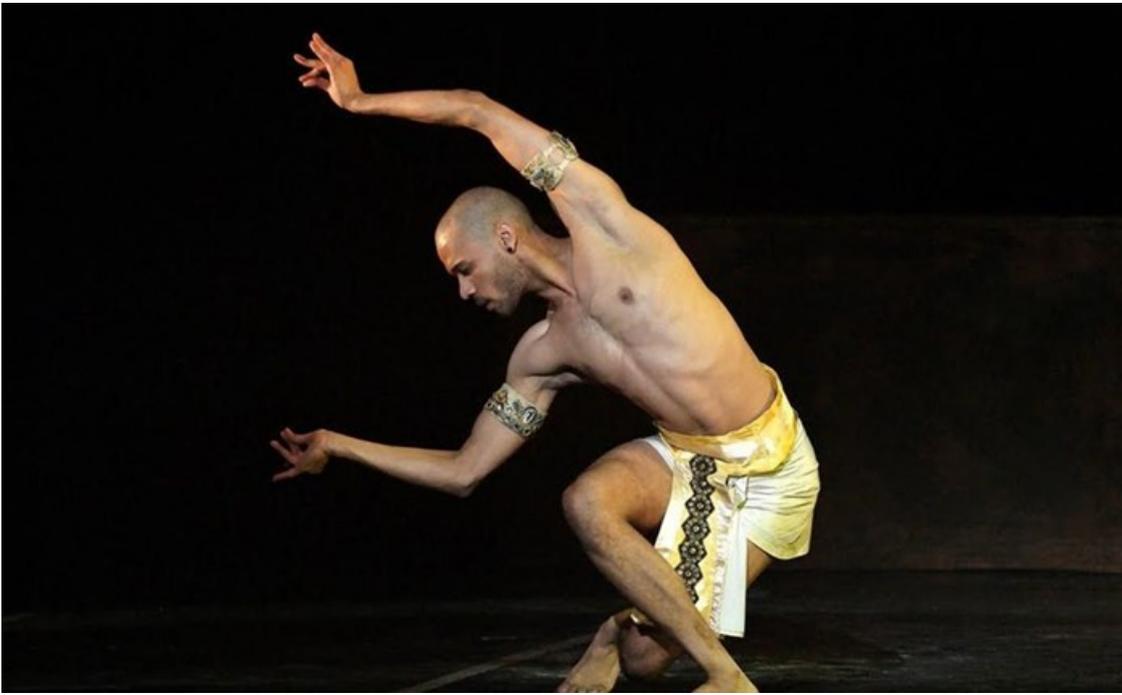
Mosaval returned to South Africa in 1976 ultimately to teach at his own independent nonracial schools in Cape Town, Mitchell's Plain and Paarl and to share his knowledge and experience with his students.



Ruan Galdino from Joburg Ballet. Image by Lauge Sorenson

Longtime friend Sharon Paulsen, a former CAPAB Ballet dancer, established a partnership with the District Six Museum more than a decade ago to perpetuate The Johaar Mosaval Legacy Project. She said Dreaming Dance is a “progression of his story to reflect the untold layers in dance and narration.”

Multi-talented Van Ster, who has racked up umpteen accolades for his stage craft during his career, previously choreographed Mosaval’s story (*From District Six to the Royal Ballet*) in collaboration with Cape Town City Ballet for the Suidoosterfees. Meanwhile Appolis brought his experience as an acclaimed director, producer, actor and writer to “deepen his creative connect with District Six.”



Shaun Oelf from Figure of 8 Dance Collective. Image by Pat Bronilow-Downing

Kudos to Figure of 8 Dance Collective, DFeatSA (Figure of 8 Dance Collective), Timo Lister Studio, Joburg Ballet, Mowbray Ballet Academy, Cape Junior Ballet, Jazzart Dance Theatre and Waterfront Theatre School for their inspirational contribution.

Coronation, featuring Shaun Oelf as the Moorish dancer, *Lady and the Fool*, featuring Cassiel Eatock as the Lady and Herton Joseph and Andre Maarman as the Fools, *The Carnival*, featuring Herton Joseph with Waterfront Theatre School and Jazzart Dance Theatre, *Petrouchka*, featuring Oelf and Amina Stephens as the ballerina were some of my favourites on the programme. Eatock was outstanding in *Coppelia*, with former Cape Town City Ballet and PACT Ballet Senior Principal Johnny Bovang even more brilliant than usual as Dr Coppelius. Joburg Ballet's Ruan Galdino and Chloe Blair brought the house down with their Bluebird pas de deux from *Sleeping Beauty*.

The finale with the full cast left everyone on a high.

ABOUT DEBBIE HATHWAY

Debbie Hathway is an award-winning writer, with a special interest in luxury lifestyle (watches, jewellery, travel, property investment) and the arts.

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