

# Carolyn Holden honoured with the Order of Isabella the Catholic



By [Debbie Hathway](#)

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A small group of family, friends and colleagues recently gathered in Cape Town to witness the award of the Order of Isabella the Catholic to Carolyn Holden, the former artistic director of La Rosa Spanish Dance Theatre who passed away suddenly on 4 April, 2013.

It was an intimate and sombre gathering. Time has not yet begun to ease the pain of Carolyn's loss. The occasion was brightened somewhat by the knowledge that the recommendation for this award had been submitted to the King of Spain, Juan Carlos 1, by Spanish Ambassador Juan Sell soon after he met Carolyn - just two months before her untimely death. She would have been so proud to be a Dame Commander of this most important civil order, granted to Spaniards and foreigners who have made significant contributions to strengthening the relations between Spain and their country.



"Like you, I am trying to overcome this feeling of sadness to try to make of this evening one to celebrate the life of Carolyn," said Ambassador Sell. "Carolyn was a wonderful woman, full of life and full of projects. My wife and I had the privilege to meet her barely a year ago when we came for the opening of parliament - we met her in the two ways possible to get to know Carolyn: to talk to her and to see her La Rosa dance.

## An amazing act of generosity to our culture

"Carolyn gave a lot to everyone, but she also gave a lot to Spain and to Spanish culture. This particular decoration is not any decoration if I may say - because she is knighted with one of the highest ranks of Isabella, the Catholic Order - but it's the way that Spain can, through our king, say thank you to Carolyn. She devoted her life to Spanish dance. What an amazing act of generosity to our culture that she so brilliantly made her own," he said.

"I know that people think mostly about art as a way to express oneself or to show one's identity, but, for Carolyn, art was also a way to reach out to others. There is so much in La Rosa of this."

Sell said that Carolyn was the perfect answer to her own academic questioning of the legitimacy of flamenco outside Spain.

"I was reading her thesis this morning, about flamenco in South Africa, entitled *Outsider in Two Places*. I think she was quite the opposite - she was an insider to both the Spanish and South African cultures that she so helped bring together."



## Loved Spain with a passion

Sell presented the award to Carolyn's mother, Barbara, who noted that her daughter loved Spain with a passion - the Spanish culture, the food, the people and, most of all, the dance. "She devoted her life to teaching and creating opportunities for Spanish dance to be shown on various platforms of performance throughout South Africa, whether in theatres, school halls, cabarets, open-air functions or lec dems, it did not matter - she just wanted it to be seen and understood that here in her own country, which she also truly loved, that there was a strong connection and place for Spanish dance in the performing arts," said Barbara.

"Carolyn evoked a passion and love for this art form among her students and it is this legacy that she leaves with us through her tireless efforts in the field of education and the performing arts evolving through her vision: La Rosa Spanish Dance Theatre. Thank you."

## 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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