

Karen Ruimy: the high-flyer who gave up finance for flamenco

By **Simon Round**, January 10, 2013
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Karen Ruimy collaborated with Strictly Come Dancing's Craig Revel Horwood

This is the time of year when many people take a look at their lives and wonder whether they are going in the right direction.

Karen Ruimy went through the same process back in the 1990s. She was the epitome of the high-flyer riding the economic boom in one of Paris's most successful finance houses. But then she decided that the life, while hugely lucrative, was no longer for her. So she left, with no idea about what she might do next but determined that, whatever it was, it would be something more fulfilling.

Perhaps some people are just born to be high achievers, because now Ruimy has replaced finance with several new careers. She is a writer, a singer and a dancer, and still has time to do globe-trotting charity work.

Over coffee at her central London mews house, Ruimy, who is in her mid-40s, recalls the moment her life changed forever. "I left my job because I felt this inner calling to understand something about my life. I really felt suddenly that the world I was in did not interest me anymore."

She had savings to fall back on which gave her time, but she says she never made a conscious decision about a new job. Rather, her career found her. She says that it became natural to start writing. "It was part of the process of understanding myself."

Her reflection on life and spirituality have been crystallised in two books, *The Angel's Metamorphosis* and the recently published *Voice of the Angel*.

But this is not all — she also decided at the age of 37 to become a professional dancer. As if this was not enough she also began to sing. "I've danced all my life. I had to do something about it."

Ruimy was born in Morocco and emigrated to France with her parents when she was seven years old. The flamenco style of dance, which she has performed at the Foile Bergere in Paris and the Lyric Theatre in London, felt very natural to her. "I feel flamenco very strongly. I see it as a mix of gypsy, Arabic and Jewish cultures. Also my grandma was Spanish. It makes sense to me."

But it was also Ruimy's Jewish-Moroccan roots which compelled her to seek a high-flying career in the financial world. Her early years in Casablanca had been "idyllic", she says. "Being Jewish in Morocco at that time was heaven. It

'I feel the dance very strongly. It makes sense to me'

was one of the very few countries where you didn't have any pressure. But Paris was a harsher place — it didn't welcome foreigners easily and as a Moroccan woman I felt I had to succeed, because if you don't succeed you have no voice and no respect in Paris."

She chose finance because it was a seductive world to a young woman in her twenties. "It was a high-speed business and it was attracting a lot of brilliant people. It is both a very intelligent business but at the same time you are completely disconnected from the outside world. You meet high-end people and you're playing with a lot of money. It was fun — a good game,

Ruimy started at HSBC in mergers and acquisitions. A year later she was head-hunted by the brokerage house Finacor. She excelled and at the age of 28 became a director. Yet even at the height her success she suspected that there was something missing.

"I was the only one who was not trading in stocks for myself. All the traders did their jobs but then traded for themselves to make more money. I really didn't care. I thought that maybe I wasn't normal. I began to feel more and more anxious. So I decided to stop and that was that. It was a relief because I felt like a hypocrite. If you don't feel part of it, you have to leave."

She still mixes with "high-end" people but they tend to be creative types, these days. Her London dance show was put on in collaboration with Strictly Come Dancing Judge Craig Revel Horwood and her new album, *Come with Me*, a fusion between Moroccan and western musical styles, has been produced with Robert Plant's guitarist, Justin Adams.

Ruimy has also been working with celebrities such as Renee Zellweger and Mariella Frostrup to promote equality for women in Africa. They have made visits to Liberia and Rwanda. She explains: "It's called the Great initiative. There are many charities which are building schools and hospitals so we don't do that. We build a platform for grass-roots women's organisations. They do amazing work. In Liberia there is a radio station created by women for women — it gives them a place to go if they have a crisis. We funded that."

Home for Ruimy, her husband Ely and their three children has been London for the past six years.

"For the first year I felt very naked here — it's hard for a newcomer. But suddenly you become part of London. It's an amazing city. People are so open-minded. I could never go back to Paris," she says.

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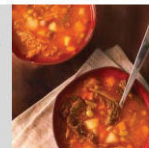
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