

Another frustrating night at the ballet for the adoring fan in row J

By VALERIE LAWSON

Who was the man in row J at the Capitol Theatre on Monday? The man with a tan, in a tuxedo and black and white scarf?

When La Bayadere ended to rapturous applause, the English ballerina Darcey Bussell curtseyed low and touched her hand to her heart. The man in row J leaned forward and clapped even harder than the other adoring fans.

He was Bussell's Australian father, whom she hasn't seen since she was six, doesn't want to see and didn't even know was out there, in the audience.

John Crittle, 54, would love to reclaim his world famous daughter, whom he abandoned in London as a child.

He had named her Marnie Mercedes Darcey Pembleton Crittle - Marnie after his grandmother, Marnie Rose.

He lives in Mullumbimby. Bussell, 29, lives in London, where she is a prima ballerina at the Royal Ballet.

"She was a beautiful child," Mr Crittle told the Herald. "I used to send her presents and letters until she was eight. But I found out none were getting to her.

"She is like a mirror image of me in female form. We're the same. She likes cars, like me, Mercedes sports and four-wheel-drives, and we've both got the same weak ankle."

When Mr Crittle learnt his daughter was to guest star with the Australian Ballet, he travelled to Sydney to see her last performance here.

His business, selling pop memorabilia to auction houses, takes him to London, where last year he saw his daughter dance twice. He had previously seen her dance in New York.

The story of Bussell's real father surfaced in Nigel Dempster's newspaper column in London. Dempster was given the story by a friend of Mr Crittle. Later, Bussell told the British press that she had no interest in contacting him.

Crittle left Australia in 1963 for London, where his Dandy Fashions made clothes for pop stars including the Beatles, Rolling Stones and Georgie Fame. He owned the Dandy boutique in the Kings Road, drove a custom-made Bentley coupe and owned a large share in the disco Sybillas.

He married the former ballet dancer Andrea Williams in Chelsea and Marnie Mercedes Darcey was born in

1969.

When Mr Crittle's business ran into trouble, he left his family in London to return to Sydney in 1973, where he opened a boutique in The Rocks.

He had contact with his daughter for the last time a couple of years later. His former wife married Phillip Bussell, an Australian-born London dentist. Darcey took her stepfather's surname. (She, too, recently married an Australian, the Merrill Lynch banker Angus Forbes.)

At the end of Darcey Bussell's performance on Monday, Mr Crittle went to the stage door to ask for her. Someone said she had already left. He rang the Inter-Continental, his daughter's hotel, but the phone in her room just rang and rang.

Darcey Bussell left Sydney yesterday to return home to London. The man in row J flew back to Mullumbimby.