



Benazir Surtees on a different stage ... dancing with the western suburbs' hot real estate market.

Ballerina comes down to earth

Prima ballerina Benazir Surtees (nee Hussain) has swapped her pointe shoes for power suits to start a new career in real estate.

"But the suits have a funky edge," she insists, with an Aussie accent and down-to-earth humour which belie her sophisticated, disciplined stage persona.

The former soloist with the Royal Ballet, Australian and WA Ballet, who lists dancing at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden for President Clinton and Princess Diana among career highlights, has joined the sales team at Space Real Estate in Cottesloe.

Now 33, she had already decided 2005 would be her last season when fate intervened in the form of a serious knee injury.

"I wanted to finish with people asking me why," she said.

The WA Ballet's final production of Cinderella in November last year was meant to be "a perfect fairytale" ending to her 17-year career, she said.

But earlier, during the opening night of a contemporary ballet performance at the Quarry

Amphitheatre in January, she injured the lateral meniscus in her knee.

"My knee locked in a kneeling position and I couldn't straighten it - I had to hobble off the stage and had surgery four days later," she said.

"But I did a 'Jana Pittman' and got back in form in five weeks to dance Dangerous Liaisons, then La Boheme and finally Cinderella."

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As audiences remember the stunning Benazir.

Christie tragedy follows tragedy

Susan Christie (42) was last seen by a neighbour outside her flat in Currie Street, Daglish, at about 10.15pm on the night of November 15, 2001.

She was a mother of two boys and separated from her second husband, Rory Kirk Christie, now aged 36.

Mrs Christie was educated, witty, intelligent and pretty, but a head injury and a big drinking problem led her to lead a risky life with multiple lovers.

Up to five of her acquaintances and lovers came under police suspicion, some being far more thoroughly investigated than others.

But police focused on Rory Christie, especially after they discovered that he pretended to have a job while he was job-hunting.

Eight months after Susan's disappearance they charged him with her wilful murder. Her body has not been found.

He was convicted of murder in 2003, and later won a re-trial on appeal.

There was no confessional evidence, none of the many Daglish neighbours saw him or his car near her flat at the crucial times.

The only forensic link was spots of Susan Christie's DNA on a loud Zegna tie Mr Christie had owned while the couple was married.

This link was hotly contested on the grounds that there was no proof Mr Christie was wearing the Zegna tie at the relevant times, and that there were innocent explanations for the transfer of DNA.

Murderer stays undetected

By BRET CHRISTIAN

Rory Christie is a name that still causes hackles to rise among some members of the WA Police - in fact, two months after his acquittal, some are still seething.

He is the one who got away, who beat a murder rap on a technicality and is now holed up back in Canada, laughing at us, is their view.

But that is not how his Supreme Court judge saw it when he dismissed the Christie murder trial jury and instructed the jury to find Mr Christie not guilty.

Juries don't give reasons for their decisions. But in this case we have the luxury of hearing reasons from the judge.

He said, in effect, that on the evidence, Rory Christie could not have murdered his wife Susan.

He said that the alleged murder and the disposal of the body were two intertwined events that had to be done by the same person.

"It is not open for the jury to draw the inference that the accused (Mr Christie) had an opportunity on the Friday evening to dispose of the body," Justice John McKechnie wrote in his judgment.

So there you have it. Rory Christie could not have disposed of the body, so he could not have committed the murder.

Last weekend it emerged via ABC radio commentator Liam Bartlett that police had still not appointed a case officer to look for Susan Christie's real killer.

This is despite the fact that the original hunt for her killer was this state's most expensive, apart from the un-

successful search for the Claremont serial killer.

If it was so important then, why not now?

A clue is provided by statements WA police made to the media in Rory Christie's home town, where his Perth trials were followed with great interest.

Inspector Scott Higgins sat through much of both trials and the appeal and liaised with police witnesses.

He told Newcap Television in Lloydminster, Alberta, that he still feels police did the right thing in charging Rory Christie and doesn't feel the need to look further.

And sergeant Brian Cowie was quoted in the Calgary Herald saying that Mr Christie's acquittal "doesn't mean we didn't have the right person, but we didn't have enough to convict that person".

He is right about the last part. Highly embarrassing forensic blunders were made by local police.

The central point of Rory Christie's conviction for murder at his first trial, as that trial judge saw it, was simply not put forward at the second trial.

This was that Mr Christie's tie had become blood-soaked during the murder or clean-up, and drycleaned later that day.

Most of the length of the tie tested positive for blood, the judge told the first trial jury.

But by the second trial, it had been pointed out to police that the testing chemical, luminol, also reacts in contact with bleach, watermelon, horseradish, and citrus juice, other common products and even itself.

This was not mentioned at the first

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Oscar time for Susie

• From page 1

It scooped France's coveted Cristal d'Annecy grand prix for animation and is shortlisted for one of the British Academy of Film and Television Awards (BAFTA), which are due to be announced on Sunday next week.

Susie and Mark, who is also working in Dalkeith on the second series of the TV show Sleepover Club, said they could not be in London for the BAFTAs but were determined to be at the Oscars.

The film is described as a blend of Jules Verne and Edgar Allan Poe mystery and adventure.

It is the tale, shot in silhouette, of a disgraced airman who navigates iron airships to find a cure for the plague that has engulfed his homeland. It will be on sale on DVD next month.

There is a monster and horror; it was made in less than 18 months and shot on a tight \$500,000 budget.

Secret Life of Us and Star Wars actor Joel Edgerton provides the voice of Jasper Morello.

Mark, who is originally from Melbourne and was a lawyer and an actor before turning to scriptwriting, said: "My son watched it and said it was quite well-made, which was praise, I think."

Susie said: "A lot of people who have seen it are now asking for a second look."

News that the film was in line

for one of the film industry's top accolades came hot on the heels of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announcing the nominees last week at the old Sunset Hospital.

A friend called Susie when the list of finalists was posted on the internet.

"I had gone to bed early because there are a lot of 6am starts when you are working on a project like this," she said.

The original Sleepover Club was filmed in Queensland, but the agreement by Susie's backers to relocate to Perth means jobs for a crew of 60 and roles for WA's young actors.

Students from Churchlands Senior High School, where some of the scenes are being filmed, have had parts as extras and dancers from the Imperial Ball Room backed up the core cast of five girls and three boys in scenes shot this week.

Susie, who studied at the WAIT film school at what is now Curtin University, said Perth was an ideal location for film-making.

"The weather is usually good and that is important because with children's television budgets you really get the chance to do things only once."

Increased demand from overseas film-makers with big budgets was squeezing Australian crews out of locations in the eastern states, she said.

And the old Sunset Hospital could provide almost everything film-makers needed.

There are sets for three different bedrooms for Sleepover Club 2, as well as others, including a mock school hall disco and a recreation room at the fictitious Seaview Orphanage.

"We really have not got a facility to match this anywhere else in Australia," Susie said.

PLC teacher Jan McMahon fostered Susie's interest in photography and imagery. But it was her father who inspired her career, she said.

"He had thousands of feet of Standard 8 film of the family."



Jasper Morello navigates through the mist in a scene from the award-winning movie.

Tight clamp on Oval grog

• From page 1

For the first time fans will be able to buy mid-strength spirits – rum or bourbon and cola.

Until now, drinks have been limited to mid-strength beer or wine.

The change is being made because a major rugby sponsor is a liquor company – but police and Subiaco council were concerned about full-strength spirits being sold.

Drinking in stadiums is a tricky issue.

Rugby is a comparatively short game – two halves of 45 minutes each, with a 10-minute half-time.

The new competition happens on Friday nights across summer in warm weather – when people tend to drink more.

The logistics of serving drinks to about 30% of the crowd in only 10 minutes are formidable.

The number of bars, staff and equipment limit what can be done – so does the cost of setting all that

up for just 10 minutes.

Similarly, operators balk at asking manufacturers to provide a special mid-strength drink; but if the liquor licence demands mid-strength spirits, then that strengthens the argument.

Some observers say there is a trend for fans to drink at hotels and bars before going to the ground and to top up at the game.

Some say rugby fans tend to be males who are big drinkers – but fairly sociable and not aggressive.

Australian Rules followers are said to include more family groups.

Soccer fans are often considered the loudest.

Troublemakers linked to all codes are said to be a tiny minority who set out to get drunk and get into fights.

Rugby has no dry areas – but the West Coast Eagles have 450 seats and the Fremantle Dockers 2100 dry seats where drinking is banned.

Steve's demolition

Demolition crews moved into the heritage-listed Steve's Nedlands Park Hotel on Thursday.

Murray McHenry, one of the hotel owners, said ground-floor bars were closed, but a café-style food bar was open on the first floor.

On Tuesday, councillors are due to rubberstamp changes to a development plan approved last year.

The details are secret until they are presented to the State Administrative Tribunal on Friday, February 17.

\$2000 fine for cannabis in car

A 21-year-old Claremont man was given a suspended sentence and fined \$2000 after pleading guilty to possessing cannabis worth \$2250 with intent to sell or supply.

Cottesloe police caught the man speeding along the backroads of Claremont before pulling him over on Stirling Highway on February 1.

The police found \$1700 cash and the cannabis in the car.

Murderer stays undetected

• From page 12

trial, even though luminol has been in use as a forensic tool since 1939.

So by the second trial last November, this luminol evidence had simply vanished.

There was also no evidence that the tie drycleaned on the "murder afternoon" was the same one that had given the discredited luminol reaction.

Luminol was also used by the prosecution to try to prove that Mrs Christie was murdered in a bloodbath in her one-bedroom flat, and her body dragged around.

But an independent review of that evidence cast huge doubt on the police scenario.

At one stage mid-trial the judge threw out evidence of a bizarre police experiment where a burly police officer was dragged around an office.

The final implication was that Susan Christie was not killed at home, but somewhere else.

How could it all have gone so badly wrong? Why did Rory Christie spend three-and-a-half years in a maximum security jail on this flimsy, flawed evidence?

What did two trials and an appeal cost in money as well as human terms, including the effect on the lives of the jurors and 117 prosecution witnesses summonsed to court?

How did it come about that Mr Christie's then five-year-old son Frazer so tragically lost not only his mother but his father as well?

Could this happen to you, me, your brother, sister or son or daughter? It could, and it has. Watch this space as the year unfolds.

Would a Christie trial have happened at all had Attorney-General Jim McGinty not abolished committal hearings, designed to test the evidence before trial?

The official line is that at the second trial, a witness changed her evidence about Rory Christie's whereabouts on the crucial Friday night.

But the POST has learned that this witness initially recalled a crucial detail, then had doubts, then at the latest trial, stuck to her original story.

There is more, much more, to the Christie saga, much of it deeply disturbing.

And finally, will there ever be another serious hunt for Susan Christie's real killer?

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