

NBC producer on Spector jury

Selecting a 'Dateline NBC' executive who has researched the case is risky for the music producer's lawyers but may pay off, experts say.

By Peter Y. Hong, Times Staff Writer
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One of the jurors chosen for the Phil Spector trial is a "Dateline NBC" producer who covered the O.J. Simpson and Michael Jackson court proceedings and had been researching the music producer's murder case for several months.

According to a written juror questionnaire released by the court Friday, the producer, a 41-year-old Pasadena man, said that his personal expertise included "covering high-profile trials (I have covered Simpson, Jackson and worked on many others)." The producer also wrote that "for several months, I have been assigned to this case for NBC News as a senior producer," and noted that he had read numerous court documents in the case.

The presence of a juror intimately familiar with the case and the criminal justice system defies a common presumption that lawyers prefer less-educated jurors who can be manipulated. True crime is a staple of the "Dateline" news magazine, which includes a feature called "To Catch a Predator" that conducts stings on suspected pedophiles seeking young teenagers in Internet chat rooms.

Dallas jury consultant Robert Hirschhorn, a veteran of high-profile criminal cases, called seating the producer on the jury "a risky move" for defense lawyers, but one that could pay off.

"If he's not doing it to advance his career, he could be the best juror. With so much knowledge and experience, he will be persuasive and will bend over backward to be fair to Spector — as long as he's not coming in with an agenda," Hirschhorn said.

Prosecutors have less to fear, Hirschhorn said, because, "the media typically reports on people as if they are guilty. They're taking a chance he'll be consistent with journalists. A lot of them presume a person's guilty until proven innocent."

Hirschhorn said the producer will be "the de facto foreman if not the in-fact foreman."

The panel of nine men and three women also includes an engineering doctoral candidate, a senior vice president of marketing for New Line Cinema, an administrative assistant for a deputy mayor of Los Angeles and two mechanics.

One juror is an administrator at a law firm; another is a clerk in Los Angeles County Superior Court.

Spector is accused of shooting actress Lana Clarkson through the mouth. She was found dead in his Alhambra mansion the morning of Feb. 3, 2003, after accompanying him home from the House of Blues in West Hollywood, where she worked as a hostess. He has pleaded not guilty.

Lawyers for the prosecution and defense declined to comment on the jury composition.

The 18-page jury questionnaire, filled out by every person considered for regular and alternate seats, asked for general background information as well as questions about their views on the case. Their names are kept secret.

Jurors are not allowed to discuss the case outside of court, so the producer would be legally barred from reporting on his experiences while on the jury. Jurors were ordered last month not to discuss the case and to ignore media coverage of Spector.

The producer also listed as part of his employment history freelance work or internships for newspapers, including the Los Angeles Times.

He noted that he has met "as a journalist" Michael Baden, a forensics expert working for the defense, who is also the husband of one of Spector's lawyers, Linda Kenney Baden. He wrote that he also may have supervised coverage of Henry Lee, Vincent DiMaio, Cyril Wecht and Werner Spitz, other defense expert witnesses in the case.

During questioning by lawyers, the man said he thought he could be fair; his only concern was that he would have to separate what he knows about the case from what the judge has permitted as evidence.

On Monday, the first day of questioning, he asked to approach the bench to discuss his status with the court. The transcript of his discussion was ordered sealed by Judge Larry Paul Fidler.

Like all of the 12 jurors in the case, the producer wrote that he is not a Spector fan.

Along with the "Dateline" producer, there is another NBC employee, an electrician at the network's Burbank studio. The youngest juror is 32, the oldest 60. Their average age is 48.

Jury consultants have said they do not believe that the race or sex of jurors is important in the Spector case.

Four jurors have college or advanced degrees, five had some college, one did not finish high school.

One juror, the civil engineer working on a doctorate, wrote that he did not regularly follow any of the 40 newspapers, magazines, television and radio programs or websites listed on the questionnaire except the television show "CSI."

He did, however, know of Spector and wrote, "I live in Alhambra and have seen Mr. Spector at Target." Asked to characterize any opinion he might have formed, he answered, "I believe that he dresses eccentrically based on seeing him in public."

The juror stated that he had "no real interest in publicized cases except running into them in the news."

Asked if they believed celebrities in Los Angeles are treated differently by police, six jurors disagreed, five agreed and one had no opinion.

Selection of five of the six alternate jurors is expected to conclude Monday. Opening statements in the trial, which is expected to last up to three months, will probably begin Wednesday.

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(INFOBOX BELOW)

A look at the Spector jury

Profiles of the 12 anonymous jurors who will hear the Phil Spector murder trial emerged in questionnaires released by the court Friday. Here are a sample of the statements and answers from the 18-page surveys, which jurors completed prior to their selection Thursday, covering attitudes toward celebrities, DNA evidence and guns.

Juror No. 9 is a 54-year-old man from Los Angeles with some college education who works as a facilities manager at a law firm.

13h. Celebrities and high-profile people in Los Angeles are treated the same way by the police as anyone else.

- Strongly Agree

30. Over the past several years, what publicized court cases have you followed or paid attention to (e.g. OJ Simpson, Robert Blake, Michael Jackson, etc.)?

- Robert Blake, O.J. and M. Jackson

38b. In a trial, I would need to hear from the person accused.

- Agree

75. How do you feel about DNA evidence?

I think it is pretty accurate.

Juror No. 15 is a 45-year-old woman from La Puente with a high school education who works as a correspondence representative for Wells Fargo Bank.

13h. Celebrities and high-profile people in Los Angeles are treated the same way by the police as anyone else.

- No opinion

30. Over the past several years, what publicized court cases have you followed or paid attention to (e.g. OJ Simpson, Robert Blake, Michael Jackson, etc.)?

- I followed all 3 of these cases to some extent, not more than the normal teasers on TV & radio.

38b. In a trial, I would need to hear from the person accused.

- Disagree

75. How do you feel about DNA evidence?

- I feel DNA is good. DNA has proven guilt and innocence on a lot of cases. Cold cases.

Juror No. 34 is a 54-year-old woman from El Segundo with a high school education who works as an administrative assistant for the city of Los Angeles.

13h. Celebrities and high-profile people in Los Angeles are treated the same way by the police as anyone else.

- Disagree

30. Over the past several years, what publicized court cases have you followed or paid attention to (e.g. OJ Simpson, Robert Blake, Michael Jackson, etc.)?

- O.J. Simpson

38b. In a trial, I would need to hear from the person accused.

- Disagree

75. How do you feel about DNA evidence?

- N/A

Juror No. 54 is a 56-year-old man from Culver City with a bachelor's degree in environmental health science, who works as an environmental health specialist for Los Angeles County.

13h. Celebrities and high-profile people in Los Angeles are treated the same way by the police as anyone else.

- Disagree

30. Over the past several years, what publicized court cases have you followed or paid attention to (e.g. OJ Simpson, Robert Blake, Michael Jackson, etc.)?

- In general, I followed these cases because they were in the news at the time ...

38b. In a trial, I would need to hear from the person accused.

- Agree

75. How do you feel about DNA evidence?

- It is a tool

Juror No. 128 is a 45-year-old man from Los Angeles with a bachelor's degree in economics/geography and a master's in film; he is a child support officer for Los Angeles County.

13h. Celebrities and high-profile people in Los Angeles are treated the same way by the police as anyone else.

- Strongly Agree

30. Over the past several years, what publicized court cases have you followed or paid attention to (e.g. OJ Simpson, Robert Blake, Michael Jackson, etc.)?

- None. There are more interesting things to see and do to focus on just one individual.

38b. In a trial, I would need to hear from the person accused.

- Disagree

75. How do you feel about DNA evidence?

- N/A

Juror No. 154 is a 60-year-old man from Pico Rivera with a high school education who works as a shop repair mechanic for Southern California Gas.

13h. Celebrities and high-profile people in Los Angeles are treated the same way by the police as anyone else.

- Disagree

30. Over the past several years, what publicized court cases have you followed or paid attention to (e.g. OJ Simpson, Robert Blake, Michael Jackson, etc.)?

- O.J. Simpson

38b. In a trial, I would need to hear from the person accused.

- Agree

75. How do you feel about DNA evidence?

- It could be a factor in a case.

Juror No. 156 is a 47-year-old man from Pico Rivera with some college education who works as a trailer mechanic for FedEx Freight West.

13h. Celebrities and high-profile people in Los Angeles are treated the same way by the police as anyone else.

- Agree

30. Over the past several years, what publicized court cases have you followed or paid attention to (e.g. OJ Simpson, Robert Blake, Michael Jackson, etc.)?

- None

38b. In a trial, I would need to hear from the person accused.

- Agree

75. How do you feel about DNA evidence?

- I feel that DNA testimony is reliable.

Juror No. 170 is a 49-year-old man from Glendale with an associate's degree who works as an electrician for NBC studios.

13h. Celebrities and high-profile people in Los Angeles are treated the same way by the police as anyone else.

- Agree

30. Over the past several years, what publicized court cases have you followed or paid attention to (e.g. OJ Simpson, Robert Blake, Michael Jackson, etc.)?

- O .J. Simpson and Robert Blake

38b. In a trial, I would need to hear from the person accused.

- Disagree

75. How do you feel about DNA evidence?

- DNA is other piece of evidence to consider.

Juror No. 198 is a 37-year-old woman from Los Angeles with a high school education who works as a court services assistant for Los Angeles Superior Court.

13h. Celebrities and high-profile people in Los Angeles are treated the same way by the police as anyone else.

- Disagree

30. Over the past several years, what publicized court cases have you followed or paid attention to (e.g. OJ Simpson, Robert Blake, Michael Jackson, etc.)?

- None

38b. In a trial, I would need to hear from the person accused.

- Disagree

75. How do you feel about DNA evidence?

- It could be more concrete.

Juror No. 208 is a 52-year-old man from Los Angeles with some college education who works in marketing for New Line Cinema.

13h. Celebrities and high-profile people in Los Angeles are treated the same way by the police as anyone else.

- Disagree

30. Over the past several years, what publicized court cases have you followed or paid attention to (e.g. OJ Simpson, Robert Blake, Michael Jackson, etc.)?

- None

38b. In a trial, I would need to hear from the person accused.

- Disagree

75. How do you feel about DNA evidence?

- No opinion

Juror No. 216 is a 32-year-old man from Alhambra with a master's degree in engineering who works as a civil engineer for Los Angeles County's Public Works Department.

13h. Celebrities and high-profile people in Los Angeles are treated the same way by the police as anyone else.

- Agree

30. Over the past several years, what publicized court cases have you followed or paid attention to (e.g. OJ Simpson, Robert Blake, Michael Jackson, etc.)?

- I have no real interest in publicized cases except running into them in the news.

38b. In a trial, I would need to hear from the person accused.

- Disagree

75. How do you feel about DNA evidence?

- DNA evidence is a tool used to help understand facts in a case. It is not always error-free.

Juror No. 268 is a 41-year-old man from Pasadena with a bachelor's degree in English and American literature and language who works as a television producer for NBC News. 13h. Celebrities and high-profile people in Los Angeles are treated the same way by the police as anyone else.

- Disagree

30. Over the past several years, what publicized court cases have you followed or paid attention to (e.g. OJ Simpson, Robert Blake, Michael Jackson, etc.)?

- Primarily the Jackson and Simpson cases, but many others around the country, constantly.

38b. In a trial, I would need to hear from the person accused.

- Disagree

75. How do you feel about DNA evidence?

- It is commonly used; would have to evaluate it like any other evidence.

Source: Juror questionnaire

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