



STEVE LOPEZ:
POINTS WEST

Glad that Spector didn't take a powder

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Phil Spector is parading down the hall on the way to his murder trial with not one, not two, but three extra-large bodyguards. It looks like a wedge of beefy NFL linemen is blocking for the strangest looking quarterback in history.

When Spector gets closer, in a knee-length suit and a shirt the color of dried blood, I can't quite figure out who he looks like, but then it comes to me:

He is the character on the Buster Brown shoes my mother used to get me, with hair no one but Jean Stapleton would have left the house with. At the very least, I'd dump the makeup artist. Spector looks like he's just had a wreck with a Pillsbury flour truck.

Spector is the Wall of Sound music mogul who revolutionized studio recording with girl groups like the Ronettes and the Crystals and worked with Cher, the Rolling Stones and some of the Beatles. He is charged with fatally shooting actress Lana Clarkson in his Alhambra castle more than four years ago, and until he showed up for the start of his trial Wednesday, I wasn't sure whether to expect him.

I thought there was a chance Spector might buy a new set of fright wigs and head for Tahiti or Morocco. Anywhere but here, where his alleged comment to his driver moments after the shooting — "I think I killed somebody"—will become its own wall of sound.

Spector's all-star attorneys, led by John Gotti defender Bruce Cutler, would like for jurors to swallow an entirely different scenario. Namely that on their first date, Clarkson shot herself in the mouth with Spector's .38-caliber revolver.

Richard Burns, a veteran court watcher who took an early morning train all the way from Riverside to get a seat at the trial, wasn't buying it.

"I think he killed her," Burns said. "She had powder burns on her hands, but it could've been from putting her hands up to defend herself."

In his opening statements, prosecutor Alan Jackson promised to lay out a history of Spector gunplay and violence against women, leading to the moment when he "put a loaded pistol inside Lana Clarkson's mouth — *inside her mouth* — and shot her to death."

Then came Cutler, the New York native who didn't seem to know whether this was a murder trial or a one-man Broadway show. I don't know if an over-the-top tough-guy shtick — which worked well in the Gotti case — is going to fly with a jury of sensible Angelenos.

"Tall tales," Cutler said dismissively of the allegations, sounding for all the world like Rob Reiner's Meathead character. As if describing the greatest miscarriage of justice in history, he claimed Spector was targeted by hellbent cops because of his fame and success, not because of the blood on his hands.

"The evidence will show this was an accidental suicide," he promised.

Accidental suicide?

Thank God for celebrity trials. Where else do you get this kind of stuff?

Before this one ends, I'm hoping to get in touch with Robert Blake. All I'm asking, Bobby, is one day of watching this thing with you on Court TV.

Maybe I should have asked Vanity Fair's Dominick Dunne to hook me up. I met the celebrity journalist at the trial and noticed he was using a notepad with the same image printed on every single page.

His own.

If I'm going to keep covering this trial, I need some flash of my own. Maybe Dutch Boy wigs, bodyguards or S. Lo notebooks.

Can anyone out there lend me an eye patch?

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