



Spector's past put on view at trial

The prosecutor alleges a pattern of threats. The defense cites his talent.

By Peter Y. Hong, Times Staff Writer
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Four years after actress Lana Clarkson was found dead in his home, Phil Spector faced the first day of his murder trial Wednesday, listening intently as the prosecution declared him a "sinister, deadly" man who "put a loaded pistol into Lana Clarkson's mouth and shot her to death."

Deputy Dist. Atty. Alan Jackson used much of his 90-minute opening statement to link Clarkson's death to a pattern of threats the prosecutor said the gun-wielding, rock 'n' roll pioneer had made in the past against women who resisted his advances.

Describing an alleged 1988 incident, Jackson painstakingly detailed the way Spector intimidated a different woman at his home. "She had her purse on her shoulder, she was standing in the foyer," Jackson said.

Spector "at gunpoint ordered her to sit down ... he pressed the barrel of the gun against her face, her neck, driving the barrel into her cheek and forehead," Jackson said.

Jackson did not explicitly say so, but his description of the 1988 incident coincided with the basic facts of Clarkson's death: She was found slumped in a chair in the foyer of Spector's Alhambra faux castle, her leopard-skin purse on her shoulder, as if she had been ready to leave.

Spector emerged from the house, Jackson said, and told his driver, "I think I killed somebody."

Jurors sat somberly throughout Jackson's statement, showing no expression even as the prosecutor projected photographs of Clarkson's limp body in the red-carpeted hallway, the lower half of her face mangled and red with blood. Spector did not appear to look at the photo, and at times seemed nervous, occasionally shaking his head from side to side as if to say, "No."

Defense attorney Bruce Cutler followed Jackson with his opening statement, which he is scheduled to complete today. He characterized Clarkson's shooting as "an accidental suicide."

Cutler emphasized Spector's achievements in the music world, cautioning that his success was earned through talent and hard work, and should not be confused with entitlement. Telling the tale of a "lower middle-class" 9-year-old boy who moved with his mother from the Bronx to Los Angeles to become a music legend, Cutler said, "I don't want any of you to feel that somehow, some way, anything was given to Phillip."

Using his trademark "Wall of Sound," Spector produced such hits as the Righteous Brothers' "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin' " as well as recordings for the Beatles and the Ramones.

Spector, 67, is charged with murdering Clarkson, 40, in the early morning of Feb. 3, 2003.

He has pleaded not guilty and has been free on \$1-million bail.

Jackson argued that Spector revealed his guilt by trying to hide what really happened to Clarkson. Projecting a slide with a caption "Spector Tried to Cover Up His Crime," Jackson said

Spector used a cloth diaper to wipe off the bloody revolver and Clarkson's face.

Blood spray patterns on Spector's jacket indicated that he was within three feet of the actress when the shot was fired, Jackson said. Spector had blood on his hands, and blood was on a doorknob and banister in the house, the prosecutor said, and blood was inside his jacket pockets. Spector also tried to wash gunshot residue off his hands as part of the cover-up attempt, Jackson said.

All of the blood, Jackson said, was Clarkson's. He pointed out that 14 phones were in the house, but that Spector did not call for help.

The snub-nosed .38-caliber revolver used to shoot Clarkson was not registered. But Jackson said it was Spector's. He showed a photograph taken by police of an ornate Georgian entry table a few feet from where Clarkson died. The top drawer was ajar, and in it, Jackson said, was a leather holster that fit the revolver. The holster was the same brand as others in the house, and the gun was loaded with a somewhat unusual ammunition, which also was found in the castle, the prosecutor said.

Jackson repeatedly called Spector's statement "I think I killed somebody" a confession. It was, he said in closing, "a confession that rings true in this courtroom today."

Spector's defense was delayed by a dispute over the admissibility of some evidence. Cutler had planned to quote disoriented, profanity-filled remarks that police reported Spector had made, asserting that Clarkson shot herself. Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Larry Paul Fidler said Cutler could not introduce the evidence.

The famously dramatic Cutler responded to the setback with characteristic brio: "I feel like my pants are down, like I'm naked before the court," he declared. He then asked — and was granted — permission to go to the men's room.

When he returned, Cutler had 45 minutes to streak through part of his opening statement. After recounting Spector's Horatio Alger story, he directed his remarks away from his client, targeting those who will testify against him.

Adriano DeSouza, the driver who said Spector told him he might have killed Clarkson, was a "substitute driver," with limited English, "who was full of snacks, cookies and water and sound asleep" in the car, which was parked outside the house. Cutler said DeSouza could not, as he had told police, have heard the gunshot, and asserted that the driver misstated what Spector told him.

Cutler painted a picture of police with "murder on their minds," who locked themselves into the position that Spector had killed Clarkson. "Murder on their mind! Murder on their mind!" he shouted, facing the jury.

He called one woman who will testify against Spector "a bank thief" and said witnesses had tried to sell their stories to tabloids. He said the women sought Spector's company and enjoyed moving in his circles.

Cutler said one of the women accompanied Spector to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremonies. He said that Tina Turner — whose history as a victim of domestic violence was the subject of a Hollywood movie — introduced Spector at the hall. Cutler let Turner's history go unmentioned.

After the shooting, Spector did not call the police because he was shaken and disoriented, Cutler said. His statements that morning "do not show consciousness of guilt," he shouted, waving a fist. They revealed what Cutler said was Spector's state at the time, one of "terrorized innocence!"

Cutler said the evidence would show that Clarkson shot herself while "playing with guns in a provocative, salacious manner." He said her death "can be an accidental suicide."

The evidence, Cutler said, will show "Phillip was not holding that gun ... she was." He told jurors after seeing the evidence, they would "never accept that there is evil" in Spector.

The Spector case is the first celebrity murder case in Los Angeles to be televised since the O.J. Simpson trial in 1995. Many legal observers are watching it as a test case of whether cameras will once again send a trial spiraling into an out-of-control media event.

But at this trial, the television cameras are discreetly hidden in black boxes above the jurors' heads, lessening the temptation for lawyers and witnesses to play to them.

And Spector is not Simpson. His lesser fame was underlined by Jackson, who told jurors that when Clarkson met him the night of the shooting at the House of Blues nightclub, where she worked as a hostess, she mistook him for a woman. Even after he told her his name, it didn't register, Jackson said.

The 911 operator who took a call from Spector's driver the night of the shooting also was stumped by the producer's name, according to a recording played for jurors Wednesday. "Seal inspector?" the operator asked, prompting laughter in the courtroom. Spector glowered at the mirth.

When Spector's driver spelled Spector's name, the operator asked, "Is he Asian, white, Hispanic?"

After Cutler and defense attorney Linda Kenney Baden conclude their opening statements today, prosecutors are expected to call two women to the stand to testify that Spector threatened them. Also on the witness list are a police officer and an employee of the Carlyle Hotel in New York, where one of the earlier threats allegedly took place.

peter.hong@latimes.com

Times staff writer John Spano contributed to this report.

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(INFOBOX BELOW)

Timeline

On Feb. 2, 2003, Phil Spector's chauffeur drove the legendary record producer and a series of dates to Southern California dining and entertainment hot spots. By the next morning, Lana Clarkson would lie dead in Spector's house and he would be accused of murder. Visit latimes.com/spector for more information.

- **7 p.m.** Phil Spector leaves his Alhambra home to pick up dinner date Rommie Davis in Studio City.
- **8 p.m.** Spector and Davis go to the Grill on the Alley in Beverly Hills for dinner. Spector agrees to take waitress Kathy Sullivan out later that night.
- **10 p.m.** Spector takes Davis home to Studio City.

- **11 p.m.** Spector returns to the Grill on the Alley to pick up Sullivan.
- **11:30 p.m.** Spector and Sullivan spend time at Trader Vic's in Beverly Hills.
- **12:45 a.m.** Followed by Spector, Sullivan drops off her car at her West Hollywood home.
- **1 a.m.** Spector and Sullivan spend time at Dan Tana's in West Hollywood.
- **1:45 a.m.** Spector and Sullivan visit the House of Blues on the Sunset Strip in West Hollywood.
- **2 a.m.** Spector's driver takes Sullivan home and returns to the House of Blues.
- **2:20 a.m.** Spector takes House of Blues hostess Lana Clarkson to an employee parking garage. She moves her car from there to a nearby street parking space.
- **3 a.m.** Spector and Clarkson arrive at his Alhambra home.
- **About 5 a.m.** Spector allegedly tells his driver, "I think I killed somebody."

Note: Chauffeur Adriano DeSouza drove Phil Spector throughout the evening. All times are approximate.

Source: Times reporting