



Spector's lawyers tell jurors that Clarkson shot herself

Defense cites scientific evidence and paints police as eager to blame the music legend.

By Peter Y. Hong, Times Staff Writer
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A day after prosecutors tagged him a "sinister, deadly" murderer, Phil Spector's lawyers fought back Thursday, contending that police railroaded Spector and that scientific evidence proves actress Lana Clarkson shot herself through the mouth.

The legendary producer of songs for the Beatles, Ike and Tina Turner, and the Righteous Brothers is on trial for allegedly murdering Clarkson at his Alhambra mansion Feb. 3, 2003. He has pleaded not guilty and has been free on \$1-million bail.

Wrapping up their opening statements, Spector's lawyers hammered their point that police were bent on pinning the death on their client.

"Murder on their mind!" one of the attorneys, Bruce Cutler, bellowed seven times Thursday morning, punctuating the slogan with thrusts of his fists.

Cutler told jurors of detectives hot for a "high-profile" suspect with spiteful witnesses. "Keep in mind a case can be rehearsed, scripted and choreographed," he said of anticipated testimony from women who will say Spector threatened them with guns.

Spector occasionally smiled as his lawyers spoke, but for much of the morning he stared blankly away from the attorneys and jury. By afternoon the first witness, one of the women scheduled to speak of the alleged threats, had testified.

Cutler's barrage against the police and prosecution witnesses was followed by attorney Linda Kenney Baden's attempt at surgical strikes using scientific evidence.

Unlike people testifying against Spector, Kenney Baden calmly told the jury, science "has no motive to lie, no memory problems, no language problems."

She laid out 10 points she said proved that Clarkson shot herself, based on the position of the gun, the small amount of blood and gunshot residue on Spector, and evidence that Clarkson loaded the gun.

Kenney Baden said the gun was fired inside Clarkson's mouth, causing tooth fragments, blood and tissue to spray outward. Several times, she swung her hands from her mouth outward toward the jury to show the path.

She said the blood spots sprayed on Clarkson's clothes were more numerous and much closer together than the few that landed on Spector's jacket, proving that he was not next to her.

Kenney Baden grabbed fellow defense attorney Christopher Plourd's shirt cuff and held his wrist in the air. "There was no spatter on his pants. There was none on his shoes. If he was standing close enough to put the gun all the way in her mouth and pull the trigger ... it would be all over him, like it was all over her. And it wasn't."

There was also no gunshot residue on the right-handed Spector's right jacket sleeve, she said, adding that this showed he was not holding the revolver. Perhaps most surprising, she said defense tests show that Clarkson loaded the gun. Clarkson's DNA, not Spector's, was on the ammunition found in the revolver, she said.

In conclusion, Kenney Baden called on jurors to decide with "science ... not old stories."

The accounts she called "old stories" are to prosecutors instructive tales that explain Spector's behavior the night Clarkson died. Their first witness was Dorothy Melvin, who said Spector angrily pointed a handgun and shotgun at her in 1993.

Melvin arrived in court in a black suit matching her dark hair, holding a book titled "Life Is a Test," which she handed to a friend before taking the stand. Under questioning by prosecutors, Melvin said she had worked as Joan Rivers' manager for 23 years. After she and Spector met about 1990 in New York through a friend, she said, he left a recording of the love song "Let the Four Winds Blow" on her answering machine, followed by a message from his secretary asking her to meet him.

A romantic relationship ensued, Melvin said, and she agreed to meet Spector on the Fourth of July weekend of 1993 at the Pasadena mansion where he then lived. During her testimony, a photograph of Melvin and Spector was projected in the courtroom. In it, the two are smiling. Spector is wearing rose-colored aviator glasses, and on his lapel is a red ribbon that Melvin said honored his son Phillip, who died at age 9.

Melvin, at times smiling warmly, said the evening of July 2, 1993, began pleasantly, with Spector showing her his memorabilia collection, including John Lennon's guitar.

"He had wonderful, wonderful things to look at. I remember him drinking. He played the piano, we danced, talked, played pool," she said.

Melvin testified that Spector drank much of a bottle of vodka. Then, she said, he disappeared for about an hour, which he often did, and she fell asleep on his couch.

Melvin said she awoke sometime later, walked outside and saw Spector pointing a gun at her new car, a green Mercedes. She said he angrily claimed that he couldn't find her and pointed the gun at her, ordering her to get back in the house. Melvin testified that she was crying and "jumping around" but "I stood my ground."

Pointing at her right temple, she said Spector, holding a snub-nosed revolver, then hit her twice with the back of the hand holding the gun. Melvin said she went back to the house, where she and Spector shouted and swore at each other. Spector accused her of stealing things, she said, and told her to take her clothes off and go upstairs.

"I was sobbing. I said, 'Why are you doing this, Phil?'" Melvin testified. She said Spector told her to leave the house but that she could not take her handbag. He followed her as she drove out, pointing a shotgun at her, she said.

Melvin reported the incident to Pasadena police but said she did not press charges because she did not want herself or Rivers to "end up on the cover of the National Enquirer."

Spector attorney Roger Rosen, cross-examining Melvin, showed postcards and e-mails Spector continued to send her after the incident, suggesting they remained friendly. One postcard depicted crocodiles, with the caption "Missing You." On the back, the caption read, "Come Sit With Me," under which, in large black print, Spector signed the card, "Love, Phillip," as he did on three others.

Rosen also showed Melvin two e-mails to Spector. She said one was a mass-mailing notifying those in her address book of an e-mail change. She testified that she did not recall the other, which contained an off-color joke.

Melvin said she remained in contact with Spector after the 1993 incident but never met him alone. She said she broke all ties to him when homicide detectives visited her after Clarkson's death.

The trial broke for the weekend after Melvin's testimony. It will resume Monday with more witnesses for the prosecution, including the police officer who responded to the alleged threat against Melvin at Spector's house, and a woman who says Spector threatened her with a gun in New York in 1995.

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