



Spector trial to shift to night of the killing

His driver is expected to tell jurors that the music producer came out of his house with a gun and said, 'I think I killed somebody.'

By Peter Y. Hong, Times Staff Writer
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At the start of his murder trial, prosecutors vowed to paint "a very, very clear picture" of Phil Spector as a "sinister, deadly" figure who "put a loaded pistol into Lana Clarkson's mouth and shot her to death."

Three weeks later, the legendary music producer and murder defendant has been described by four women in court as a vicious drunk who threatened to shoot them when they spurned his advances. Now, to complete their picture of a murderous Spector, the prosecution must connect the past threat accounts to the Feb. 3, 2003, shooting of Clarkson in Spector's Alhambra castle.

"What was done in the past is still not enough to convict," said Loyola Law School professor Laurie L. Levenson.

The prosecution will have an opportunity this week with the expected courtroom appearance of Spector's driver, Adriano DeSouza. He told police that he saw a bloody Spector emerge from the house after the shooting with a gun, saying, "I think I killed somebody."

DeSouza "was as close to the event as anyone. He is the only one at the scene," Levenson said.

Coming on the heels of the four women's testimony, jurors will hear DeSouza's description of the night of Clarkson's death with a view of Spector as "someone who can turn into a potentially dangerous, violent and mean person," said USC law professor Jean Rosenbluth.

"They have laid the groundwork," said Rosenbluth, who is watching the televised trial.

Spector, who worked with the Beatles, Righteous Brothers and Ike and Tina Turner and whose work influenced later artists such as Bruce Springsteen, is charged with murdering Clarkson. He has pleaded not guilty and is free on \$1-million bail. His lawyers say Clarkson shot herself.

Long before Clarkson's shooting and the alleged threats to the four women, Spector liked to pose as a bad boy ready for violence. He never denied tales of firing a gun in a recording studio with John Lennon. A Spector biography by British author Mick Brown, to be published in the U.S. next month, contains a 1975 black and white photograph of Spector pointing a handgun out the open window of a Volkswagen bus. In a famous 1965 profile, Spector told Tom Wolfe of a nightclub scuffle and said, "I've studied karate for years. I could literally kill a guy like that. You know?"

In the trial, prosecutors limited testimony of alleged past violence to the accounts of the four women to emphasize their view of the parallels to Clarkson's death.

Three of the women said Spector threatened to shoot them at his former home in Pasadena.

Dianne Ogden, a former assistant to Spector, said that when she tried to leave his house after a 1989 party, Spector pressed the barrel of a handgun to her face and ordered her to spend the night with him. "He said he was going to blow my brains out," she told the court.

Melissa Grosvenor said Spector pointed a gun at her when she tried to leave the house in 1992 or 1993. She testified that Spector, wearing a shoulder holster and wielding a handgun, said, "If you try to leave, I am going to kill you."

Both Ogden and Grosvenor said they had put their handbags over their shoulders as they prepared to leave — a detail that matched the death of Clarkson, who was found slumped in a chair in Spector's foyer with her purse over her shoulder.

Dorothy Melvin, a former manager for comedian Joan Rivers, testified that Spector ordered her at gunpoint in 1993 to spend the night with him.

The fourth woman, photographer Stephanie Jennings, said Spector came into her room at the Carlyle Hotel in New York in 1995 with a handgun and demanded that she come to his suite.

Robert Hirschhorn, a Dallas jury consultant who has worked on numerous high-profile criminal cases, said prosecutors are "building a wall of conviction."

He said that without eyewitnesses to Clarkson's shooting, prosecutors are using "direct evidence in similar cases to show a stacking effect. When you stack complaints that show his conduct, it's not a very big step" for the jury to think Spector killed Clarkson, Hirschhorn said.

The four women's testimony was not completely damning. Three of them testified that they stayed in contact with Spector after the gun threats. And not a shot was fired in any of the earlier incidents. The defense, in cross-examination, raised inconsistencies in the women's accounts. Spector's lawyers grilled Grosvenor about a past embezzlement conviction to raise questions about her honesty.

Stanley A. Goldman, a Loyola Law School professor who has been attending the trial, said discrediting the women "would hurt the prosecution if there was one woman or two; the problem for the defense is there are four."

But even if jurors do not doubt the women's accounts, Hirschhorn said, they could still find the prosecution's argument does not hold. He said the incidents occurred long ago, no one was seriously hurt and the level of violence did not escalate with each incident.

"Patterned evidence usually gets worse, bolder and more outrageous," he said. "In this case, it doesn't seem to be that way."

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