



Coroner insists Clarkson died at the hands of another

By Michael Muskal, Times Staff Writer
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Lana Clarkson was the victim of a homicide, the coroner who examined her body today told the jury that will decide whether music producer Phil Spector killed the actress.

Dr. Louis Pena took the stand this morning as the murder trial of the music legend resumed after the holiday break. Cross-examination, which began just before lunch, will continue this afternoon.

After more than a month of witnesses testifying about Spector's lifestyle and the events of the night Clarkson died, the trial has moved into the crucial area of scientific evidence.

The defense maintains that Clarkson accidentally shot herself in the early hours of Feb. 3, 2003. The prosecution insists that Spector, 67, shot the woman, whom he first met hours earlier at the House of Blues in West Hollywood, where she worked as a hostess in the VIP area, the Foundation Room.

During his testimony this morning, Pena was unequivocal, saying several times in response to Deputy Dist. Atty. Alan Jackson's questions: "This is a homicide."

Pena said he based his decision on several factors, including the physical evidence and circumstantial conditions that ruled out suicide.

The circumstantial evidence includes Spector's statement to his chauffeur, "I think I killed somebody." Adriano DeSouza, the driver, testified that he heard Spector make the comment when he left his Alhambra home about 5 a.m., holding a gun and with blood on his hands.

The defense tried to undermine DeSouza during cross-examination, but he insisted his recollection of the quote was accurate.

In addition to the statement, Pena said the scene was not typical of a suicide.

"I've never seen a case reported" in which someone goes to a stranger's home "and magically comes up with a gun and shoots herself."

He said there was no evidence to indicate that there had been a search for the gun. "How would she have known where the gun is?" Pena said.

He also cited physical evidence--such as the lack of blood in the recesses of the gun--indicating that the weapon had been wiped.

There was blood, "but wiped away in several areas of the gun. That tells me someone manipulated the gun," he testified.

He also said the left front pocket of Spector's trousers was stained, indicating that bloody hands or a bloody weapon may have been put into the pocket. All of the blood matched Clarkson's, he said.

Pena said he ruled out suicide because there is no indication that Clarkson was depressed or suffered from a psychiatric disorder.

Two drugs, often given for psychiatric problems, were administered to Clarkson, but Pena said medical records showed that the medication was authorized by a neurologist who was treating the woman for headaches.

The records showed she was a hopeful person, Pena testified, with no history of past suicide attempts.

Pena earlier testified that Clarkson's tongue was bruised, indicating that a gun was forced into the woman's mouth. That testimony was designed to undercut the defense claim that Clarkson put the gun in her own mouth.

In the defense opening, lawyers argued that science would show that Clarkson killed herself accidentally. The defense is counting on the relative lack of blood spatter and the location of the broken teeth to buttress that claim.

Pena described how the gun was in Clarkson's mouth and the recoil shattered her top front teeth, blowing them out of her mouth. The bullet went through her head and severed her spine.

Death, he said, was likely instantaneous. Because death came so quickly, he said, Clarkson was unable to exhale or cough, so blood could not be forced out.

Lana Clarkson's mother and sister, who had been attending the trial every day, were not in court. They may have skipped the session because of the expected graphic testimony and the autopsy photographs.

Spector is accused of murdering Clarkson, 40, and if convicted, could face 15 years to life in prison.

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Staff writers Peter Y. Hong and John Spano contributed to this report.