



Jurors in Spector trial go home for weekend

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Jurors in Spector trial go home for weekend; No verdict is reached after a week of deliberations, which will resume Monday.

Jurors in the Phil Spector murder trial went home Friday without announcing a verdict after a week of deliberations that offered few clues to their thinking.

Following a request the first day to handle the gun that killed actress Lana Clarkson 4 1/2 years ago, the jurors have submitted no questions or requests to have court personnel read back testimony. Such contacts may reveal confusion over a bit of testimony, or a dispute over the meaning of a piece of evidence.

Spector, 67, is accused of second-degree murder in the Feb. 3, 2003, shooting death of Clarkson, 40.

His lawyers argued at trial that the actress, despondent over a failing career and money troubles, shot herself.

Journalists sit silently in the courtroom, both bored and anxious as the panel deliberates out of sight in a back room. The only indicator of activity is the buzzer used to summon the court staff. One buzz means deliberations have begun or ended. A single buzz followed by a pause and another buzz indicates a question or request. Jurors will buzz three times when they reach a verdict.

Moments after the start of deliberations Wednesday, a single buzzer sounded, then another. Reporters perked up.

But it turned out the jurors only wanted a marker.

The jury members arrived Friday in casual dress -- no tie for the foreman, unlike most days. Was it a sign there would be no verdict? Juries often dress up for the court and news cameras on verdict day.

The jury has been deliberating since Monday, but that doesn't translate into five full days. The judge instructed jurors on the law on Day 1, then sent them to the jury room in the afternoon; they had barely 1 1/2 hours under their belts when they went home.

Jurors begin about 9:30 a.m. and work until 4 p.m., with a 1 1/2 - hour lunch and two short breaks -- one in the morning, the other in the afternoon. That leaves typically no more than 4 1/2 hours a day to deliberate.

By the end of Friday, the jurors had deliberated 22 hours and 5 minutes, long past the less than four hours the panel in the O.J. Simpson murder trial took to acquit.

Neither the attorneys nor Spector are in the courtroom; presumably the lawyers are at work and Spector is at home. One member of the defense team, Bradley Brunon, was at the courthouse this week on another matter.

Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Larry Paul Fidler has said there will be an hour's notice before any verdict is read.

Joining local media on verdict watch have been Vanity Fair writer Dominick Dunne; Spector biographer Mick Brown, a London journalist; Court TV personnel; Spector's twin adopted sons, Louis and Gary; and a few members of the public. That number is expected to dwindle next week; Brown is heading back overseas, and Gary Spector has to return to his job at a Colorado Springs, Colo., customer service call center.

The court also has lost an alternate juror. On Thursday, Fidler excused the woman, who long ago had informed the court of a prepaid vacation. Fidler told her he "really, really" did appreciate her service, and reminded her not to discuss the case with anyone.

On Wednesday, Fidler called the jurors into the courtroom to warn that "Dateline NBC" would be airing an hourlong special on the trial that night. The judge reminded them that they are not to watch television reports on the trial.

During lunch breaks, reporters on jury watch have killed time by watching snippets of trial figures in old movies and television programs. A Spector appearance on the "I Dream of Jeannie" TV series was shown in the courthouse pressroom, as was Clarkson's blink-of-an-eye appearance in the film "Fast Times at Ridgemont High."

Jurors appeared harmonious during the more than four months they spent together. They took turns bringing in doughnuts and other snacks. There were gifts on jurors' birthdays.

Now, they appear in good spirits as they enter and leave the courtroom each day. At the trial's start, attorneys for both sides said they were pleased to have a relatively well-educated jury.

The foreman is an engineer, five members are civil servants and one juror is a film executive.

One of the jurors is a producer for "Dateline NBC." He specializes in high-profile trials.

Deliberations will resume at 9:30 a.m. Monday.

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Credit: Times Staff Writer