

Los Angeles Times



ONLINE SAVINGS ACCOUNT

We'll help pump up your savings with our **2.01%** APY* with a minimum balance of \$10,000.

Get Started

MEMBER FDIC

REPLY

<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-spector-money8-2009apr08,0,3817340.story>

From the Los Angeles Times

Spector's long legal battles may be sapping his fortune

The producer collects royalties from dozens of pop hits. But expenses from two criminal trials appear to be depleting his fortune. He's also facing a wrongful-death suit by Lana Clarkson's mother.

By Harriet Ryan

April 8, 2009

When Phil Spector was booked for murder in 2003, he was a jet-setting millionaire who stayed in luxury hotel suites, left \$450 tips on \$13 bar bills and paid cash for a 30-room mansion. Six years later, with the case against him in the hands of a jury for a second time, the famed music producer still flashes trappings of wealth -- bespoke suits, a chauffeured car and a pretty, young wife who walks down the courthouse hallway next to him in designer pumps.

But there is no doubt the lengthy legal battle has drawn down the fortune Spector, 69, amassed by writing and producing some of pop music's catchiest hits.

Since his arrest, he has used the services of at least 11 criminal defense attorneys -- including one who charged \$1 million for a year of representation, four private investigators, five paralegals, a jury consultant and a stable of expert witnesses. The bill for those scientific witnesses -- more than \$500,000 over the course of a trial and a retrial -- does not include the cost of a handful of other big-name forensic specialists, such as Henry Lee and Cyril Wecht, whom the defense retained but did not call to the stand.

"I doubt there is one-tenth of 1% of people in this country who can afford what Mr. Spector has had to put together so far for his defense," his current lawyer, Doron Weinberg, said.

A verdict in his murder trial will not relieve the financial pressure on Spector. Whatever the jury's decision, he faces a wrongful-death suit by the mother of Lana Clarkson, the actress he is accused of shooting to death in the foyer of his mansion. In civil court, the standard of proof to hold Spector responsible for Clarkson's shooting -- his defense contends it was suicide -- is much lower than in the criminal case where a conviction requires proof beyond a reasonable doubt.

The suit doesn't specify a dollar amount, but a lawyer for Donna Clarkson noted that civil jurors determining the amount of any award are to be guided in part by the quality of the relationship lost.

"Donna and Lana had an extremely close relationship. And Lana was a tremendous source of light and happiness for Donna," said lawyer John Taylor.

An attorney who represents Spector in business matters declined to comment on his financial status. There are indications, however, that he is struggling financially. Records suggest he has liquidated assets as he pays for his defense. Last year, a few months after hiring Weinberg to handle his retrial, Spector borrowed \$1.3 million against his Alhambra mansion -- nearly the entire assessed value of the hilltop estate -- according to public records. As his first trial got underway in 2007, he borrowed nearly \$800,000 against the residence and a smaller house he owns nearby, records show. And in the run-up to that proceeding, Spector allegedly discussed shopping the publishing rights to some of his music, according to claims contained in a federal suit filed by a former publisher who wanted to be first in line for such a sale.

Some changes at Spector's retrial suggested cost-cutting. The five attorneys who sat at the defense table during the first proceeding were replaced by a single lawyer for the second trial. One bodyguard has been substituted for the trio of hulking men who surrounded Spector and his wife, Rachelle, 28, at the first trial.

Spector's income appears to depend on royalties from an extensive catalog of music he has written and produced over the years. To raise funds, he could sell portions of that songbook, experts said.

"He has an opportunity [to make] a great deal of money if he decides to sell," said Chuck Rubin, the president of Artists Rights Enforcement Corp., a for-profit group that has worked for musicians seeking royalties from Spector.

Copyright records show he holds at least partial rights to more than 200 works, ranging from his chart-topping 1958 hit, "To Know Him Is to Love Him," to "River Deep Mountain High," the 1966 Ike & Tina Turner number that some consider Spector's recording Waterloo.

Experts say Spector is entitled to royalties whenever one of his songs is played on the radio, streamed online, played as background music in a restaurant, downloaded as a ring tone, used in a commercial, covered by a band, sold as sheet music or purchased in CD or MP3 form.

He is also entitled to royalties from movies that feature his music, such as the blockbuster "Dirty Dancing," which includes the Ronettes' "Be My Baby."

Not all the money goes to Spector. A former publisher gets approximately 20% of publishing fees associated with many of his songs, according to a lawyer for the company, ABKCO Music.

BMI, the performance organization that collects radio and other licensing fees, declined to provide data about the value of Spector's songs.

Determining royalties is difficult because licensing fees involve complicated formulas, constantly changing data and private contracts and agreements.

But attorney Alexander Peltz, who represented the Ronettes during their lengthy court battle with Spector over royalties, said that in the late 1980s and 1990s, the producer was taking in more than \$1 million a year in licensing fees.

The profits allowed for Spector's legendary generosity to waitresses and maitre d's. But the man who surprised dining room staff with \$100 bills has been less accommodating to those who said he owed them money. In his legal wars with musical acts who said he cheated them out of song royalties, Spector fought tooth and nail. He racked up at least \$5.7 million in legal bills in proceedings over nearly two decades, according to documents in the court case brought by Spector's former publisher.

In the end, Spector beat back many of the claims, but was ordered to pay about \$1 million in back royalties to the Ronettes and substantially less to other groups. Several acts filed another suit against him in New York in November, alleging he had failed to keep up with the royalty payments.

His reluctance to part with money has extended to his murder defense. Last year, the Westin Bonaventure hotel sued Spector and his wife for failing to pay nearly \$105,000 incurred by a defense attorney staying in the downtown hotel during the first trial. A lawyer for the hotel said in court papers that when confronted about the outstanding balance, the couple demanded a "drastic discount." According to court records, the sides recently reached a settlement.

If many people have their hand out for Spector's money, there is at least one group that doesn't want any of it. During last year's political campaigns, Spector made at least 30 separate contributions to Barack Obama and additional contributions to Democratic Senate hopefuls, including Al Franken and Kay Hagan. Spector, who attended one hearing last fall wearing a "Barack Obama Rocks" button on his lapel, gave more than \$8,000 to organizations supporting the Democratic candidate's run, including a \$250 check sent the day of opening statements in his retrial.

Franken and Hagan returned Spector's contributions. The Obama campaign and an associated group refunded \$2,600.

After an inquiry by The Times, a Democratic National Committee spokesman said the remainder would also be returned.

harriet.ryan@latimes.com

If you want other stories on this topic, search the Archives at latimes.com/archives.

TMSReprints

Article licensing and reprint options

Copyright 2009 Los Angeles Times | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)
[Home Delivery](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Archives](#) | [Contact](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Help](#)

partners:

