

Fingernail Tug-Of-War in Phil Spector Murder Case



Reuters

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By Howard Breuer

ALHAMBRA, Calif. (Reuters) - A dead woman's gunpowder-covered fingernail is at the center of a tug-of-war between prosecutors and lawyers defending music producer Phil Spector against charges that he murdered a B-movie actress last year in Los Angeles, court documents showed on Wednesday.



[Reuters Photo](#)

Prosecutors demanded that Spector's attorneys turn over the fingernail, which apparently was overlooked by detectives called to investigate the fatal shooting of actress Lana Clarkson ([news](#)) at Spector's Alhambra, Calif. mansion.

According to court documents, prosecutors found out about the fingernail after a defense investigator bragged about the find to former colleagues at a Sheriff's Department barbecue last summer.

Detective Mark Lillienfeld said defense investigator Stan White told him at the July 2 barbecue that the "torn piece of the victim's fingernail ... was blackened on one side with visible gunpowder residue from a gunshot."

The finding could lend credibility to Spector's claim to reporters last year that 40-year-old Clarkson shot herself at his castle-like home near Los Angeles.

Spector, 64, told Esquire magazine he met Clarkson for the first time only hours before the Feb. 3, 2003, shooting, while he was out bar hopping. He said that when he took her home, she took one of his guns and shot herself.



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At a hearing last month, prosecutors urged the judge in the case to force Spector's attorneys to turn over the evidence. Robert Shapiro -- Spector's defense attorney at the time -- refused, compelling attorneys to file motions on the matter and return for a hearing on Feb. 17.

Until the latest court documents were filed, attorneys had not publicly disclosed what the evidence was.

Spector's new attorney, Leslie Abramson, refused to discuss the fingernail other than to say she will file a response with the court before the hearing.

Hollywood defense attorney Ronald Richards said the fingernail will be significant only if Abramson can prove the nail did not break during a struggle for the gun or as Clarkson held her hand in front of her face as she was shot.

"It's more of a loud gun than a smoking gun," Richards said.

Spector, a legendary name in pop music, has worked with such artists as the Beatles, Ike and Tina Turner ([news](#)), the Ramones, the Shirelles and the Ronettes. He is credited with creating the distinctive, heavily layered "wall of sound" that gave an orchestra-like feeling to such pop classics as "Da Doo Ron Ron" and "Then He Kissed Me."

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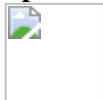
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