

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Phil Spector gets his gun out

Phil Spector handed me the phone. It was my wife Lisa on the other end of the line: ‘Your father’s died, Steven. Avril just called to tell me the news. She was drunk. She’s waiting for your call.’

I felt like I was going to be sick and, before I knew it, I was crying. The date and time are seared into my brain: 8.40pm, 19th March 1988.

More than twenty years later I still well up thinking about that call, but what also really stays in my vision is remembering the look on Spector’s face. As I relayed the news to Phil about my father, who was his business manager/lawyer and confidante for nearly two decades, there was not an ounce of compassion, just cold calculation.

After a brief, limp and lifeless hug, Phil pulled away as quickly as he could and did his best to avoid looking me in the eye. Then came his multi-million dollar question I should have seen coming: ‘How can I make sure that Avril doesn’t get my money? I know she’s going to try and take the money your Dad is holding for me.’

There were no words of comfort from Phil, just naked fear that my father’s mistress would steal his hidden fortune.

My father had helped conceal Spector’s royalties, which were worth millions, because he wanted to protect his money from his enemies, including his ex-wife Ronnie Spector, both during their bitter divorce and its aftermath. Because Phil did not hold the money, Ronnie and others couldn’t get it. Now my father’s death had changed everything and would keep changing for

years to come.

Phil and I were stood in the white-tiled kitchen pantry of his Spanish villa, high above the hills outside Pasadena. This was where the rich people in LA during the '20s had built their homes to enjoy the mountain air, instead of the stifling heat of the valleys.

But as beautiful as the location was, it also symbolised Spector's self-imposed exile: far from the bright lights and boutiques of Beverly Hills.

Phil told me that he had moved here to get away from the craziness of Beverly Hills and rid himself of the circus and its cast of freak show hangers-on that he himself had created in Hollywood. They fed off his behaviour and Phil knew he had to stop it. But even as he told me this, in the other room were his old cast of groupies.

In truth, the world Spector inhabited was as bizarre as anything created in the movies, and just because he moved to Pasadena didn't mean the reel was about to stop. Spector's world was one where people were routinely kidnapped, held at gunpoint, and terrified for kicks just so he could see what he could get away with and for how long.

Guests at his house were pitted against one another while Spector played the paranoid puppet master and psychological voyeur. He would just leave the room and then retreat to his lair to listen and watch the trapped guests – I was always convinced the rooms were bugged.

When I heard that Spector had allegedly stuck a gun inside the mouth of a B-movie actress cum waitress and blown the back of her head off, I wasn't in the least surprised that something like this should happen. The death of Lana Clarkson in 2003 in his pad was a tragedy that has been waiting to happen for decades, and I knew exactly why.

What did surprise me was that I wasn't called as a witness to his trial, because I think I could have offered some clues as to why this tragedy happened.

I was still at Vanderbilt law school when my father first introduced me to Phil Spector.

It was the fall of 1975. Spector was just about the highest profile client my father had and Machat Senior was in awe of him. With good reason, because this man was a living legend and, my father was convinced, just about the most creative music man on the planet.

My father hooked up with Spector around 1970 when his manager Allen Klein and my father went their separate ways. By then, Klein had taken control of what remained of The Beatles and their Apple Corp. Paul McCartney was breaking away from the band, slowly but surely, and the band had reached an impasse. Spector helped rescue their *Get Back* project in 1969, but Klein's contract sounded the death knell for the band because McCartney would have nothing to do with him. McCartney wanted his new wife Linda's father, Lee Eastman, to take over the reins of their publishing empire but Ringo Starr and George Harrison were happy to follow John Lennon's lead.

Lennon wanted Klein. McCartney went along with the vote but refused to sign the contract, and I can't say that I blame him. Klein was a snake and would remain a snake. A lesson I would learn later in life in spades.

Klein had initially helped to shore up the band by bringing in Phil Spector as producer and also to distract Lennon and McCartney from their unfolding feud. When Klein and Machat Senior went their separate ways, Spector realised that my father would best protect his interests. Because Klein was managing Apple and owed money to Spector, Phil realised that his manager had a potential conflict of interest. He knew only too well that Klein's sole interest was Klein and in order to get all the money Apple owed him, Spector needed someone who could strike fear into Klein. That had to be someone who knew Klein's secrets. My father fitted the role perfectly, knew it and told Spector what he wanted to hear.

This kind of calculation was Spector all over. Every business

move was analysed very carefully by Phil. He weighed up everyone's weaknesses and strengths before he would strike. He wanted to believe that no-one was stronger than him. Because most of all, Phil got off on the fear that he induced in people with his crazy behaviour.

Spector had defined pop music in the early 1960s with his 'Wall of Sound' production technique. This relied on rich layers of sound and made the pop single operatic. With more than twenty Top 40 hits between 1960-65, Phil became a multi-millionaire virtually overnight. This was when a million was a lot of money.

Spector's career was defined by the birth of rock and roll in the 1950s and his personality was defined by his reflections and interpretations of his family. His production techniques would, in turn, define pop and pop radio in the early 1960s. They were perfect for AM radio because they were powerful and really created an aural impact on the listeners. Given the poor quality of the signal and sound quality of AM radio, this was a unique selling point. But that strength would eventually prove Spector's greatest weakness: his career was defined by the 45 and his career would die with the 45.

Spector didn't have hit albums in him and I think he knew it. His whole mindset was geared towards the single but Spector's sound is like a very rich meal: you can only take it so many times. It wasn't easy listening and it wasn't album music. You could listen to The Beatles or Motown 24/7, but you couldn't do that with Spector.

When Klein stepped in to offer Spector the chance to produce The Beatles, his career was on the wane in the US but he was still a name in the UK. For Spector, it offered a fresh start. The album he produced in London – *Let it Be* – was a massive hit. Spector then stayed on in London to help produce George Harrison's solo album *All Things Must Pass* and *Imagine*, which was a big hit for Lennon.

But the twist was that Spector was never really going to get

the credit for that: it was The Beatles, after all, and he was just there to fix it. For once, Spector was 'just the producer' and not god.

But when I met this little man in an LA restaurant with my father, I couldn't have been less impressed. I say little man, because I didn't like a single thing about him. He stood there staring at me, so I stared right back at him. He stood there staring at me for a long time, so I stared back at him for a long time. Eventually Spector broke the ice and the face-off:

'Your Dad says you're the best poker player he knows. You have no fear.'

I looked at my father thinking: 'What's he telling me?'

Spector carried on: 'Well, let's see what kind of poker face you really have. I think I can get a rise out of you.'

He proceeded to take out his gun in the middle of this restaurant and asked me what I would do if he shot someone. I showed no emotion, because I wanted my father to be proud of me, but also because I thought this was bullshit. Spector asked what I would do if he shot the wall out of the restaurant and began pointing the gun around at the ceiling and walls.

Flatly, I said: 'Why would you do that? What's the game here?'

Inside, I was flipping out. I was barely out of my teens, this was supposed to be one of the most famous people in the world, yet he was acting like a moron.

My father intervened at this point and convinced Phil to put the gun away. Spector looked at me again and threatened to shoot the gun for the hell of it.

'You're very calm,' he said. I just thought this was insane behaviour, but showed no emotion and held my tongue. Afterwards, I turned to my father, once Spector had gone, and asked what on earth that had been about.

My father said: 'Phil's a bit eccentric but he would never harm a fly. He likes to test people to see what he can get away with and what they're made of.'