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LINDA KENNEY BADEN AND ACTRESS HELEN MIRREN WHO PORTRAYED HER (PHOTO COURTESY: PHILIP V. CARUSO/HBO)

True Crime: Phil Spector's Real Defense Attorney Weighs in on HBO Movie

A Q&A with Linda Kenney Baden. How close does David Mamet's film get?

March 20, 2013 | Catherine Green | Crime | 5 Comments

The tagline for **David Mamet's** film ***Phil Spector***, which premieres this Sunday (March 24) on **HBO**, starts off by warning viewers who expect journalistic accuracy: "The truth is somewhere in the mix."

A fictionalized blending of events, the movie imagines what might have happened on the night when actress **Lana Clarkson** was shot dead inside Spector's Alhambra mansion then follows Spector's subsequent murder trials and the media circus surrounding them. How true to life is this account? Criminal defense attorney **Linda Kenney Baden**, whose work on Spector's behalf in the 2007 trial forced the jury into deadlock, is cagey about the details.

"I can't confirm anything, because to confirm would be breaching the attorney-client privilege," she says when asked about her impressions of the film, which stars Helen Mirren in a role based on Baden. "I think what David [Mamet] is doing, and what juries do, is they try to see what could have happened behind the scenes."

Could the defense team have gathered a focus group to gauge the sympathy factor in Spector's case? Could they set up elaborate reenactments of what happens when you startle a woman with a gun in her mouth? Could they conduct blood splatter analysis to determine whether Spector's white jacket could have been left nearly immaculate standing arm's length from an explosive, fatal gunshot? "Sure," Baden says. "It could have happened, and maybe none of it happened."

Though her former client is serving a sentence of 19 years to life in a California prison, Baden thinks Spector is innocent. Mamet's film [raises doubts about the producer's guilt](#) as well as questions about how much merit there is to fictionalizing cases of true crime for the sake of entertainment. We talked with Baden about her reactions to the movie and how she'll look back on the career milestone of defending a music industry legend now considered a monster.

What was your reaction when David Mamet first reached out to you?

I got a call on my phone and someone said, "Hello, Linda? This is Dave Mamet." Your first reaction is, I'm being punked. Then he says, "I've written a screenplay using a character based on you with your name. Would you like to read it?" At that point, you don't care if you're being punked. If anyone's writing a screenplay, sure you'd like to read it! David then emailed me what he had written and within like an hour, I sent him back notes on technical aspects, on some of the jargon. This went on a couple times and finally he said, "Would you consult on the technical aspects?" I told him, "I can't tell you what happened behind the scenes, but I'd love to work with you on the technical aspects so that's all correct."

You hit the jackpot with Helen Mirren playing you.

Yeah, you try to be cool about it, but even as a jaded lawyer, when the producers call you up and say, "Do you wanna know who's playing you? Helen Mirren," you get off the phone and you're like, "Oh my God!" It's surreal. It's almost unnerving, sitting there watching somebody portray you.

Let me just say that in terms of her portrayal of me, I thought that she really nailed the passion and the commitment that I have to both that case and pretty much any case that I try. As an attorney, you tend to leave a piece of yourself with every case. If you're doing a good job for your clients, you are involved basically on a 24-hour basis mentally and it takes a toll on any attorney. As a matter of fact, I hope what I do as a lawyer could do her justice as an actor.

How did you go about helping her get ready for the role once Bette Midler was out (due to back problems)?

I didn't have as much time (with Mirren). We did speak on the phone, we did email several times, and she had all the notes that I had given Bette in terms of how I approach cases. HBO also had obtained the video of the trial so everyone was able to see how I worked and what my mannerisms are. It was a pleasure meeting with her and it's obviously exciting to have someone like Helen play you. I hope the gravitas is conveyed in the role.

What did you think of Al Pacino as Phil Spector?

Al obviously had watched a lot of tape of Phil. I thought that he had a lot of his mannerisms down correctly, how he spoke. I did think that Al's performance showed a side of Phillip that the Helen Mirren character could talk to. I thought that was very good. Anyone who watched that, I think, came out thinking there is another side to Phil Spector that maybe no one realized before Al's performance.

Is it at all problematic to fictionalize cases like these?

I think it depends on who the writer is. With someone like David Mamet, whose dad had been a lawyer and who really respects the law, it's fine. You know it's going to have an importance, and he did explore a number of themes in this movie — our age of Twitter and social media, and media attaching to trials like they were at the Coliseum with the Romans and lions. Do juries and the public pay more attention to the look of the character and maybe the freakishness of defendants as opposed to the facts? I think those are themes that have to be explored. I think with a lesser writer it may not be a good thing, but with someone like Mamet, it is a very good thing.

You mentioned public perception of Spector as a freakish character. Do you feel protective of him?

I do feel that there are a number of stories out there which do not reflect the client that I grew to know. I'm not sure you can call it protective. It's like anything else. We talk about Spector's hair and the question becomes: Why did that become something we judge him on? Like David, I am concerned about those types of things infiltrating a trial.

Ten, 20 years from now, how do you think you'll look back on trial? Do you think fondly of Phil as a person?

Yes, I do. I was perturbed to find that the second trial didn't go as well as the first trial. [Baden was unable to participate in the 2009 trial due to reactive arthritis as a result of her pneumonia during the 2007 trial.] With any client, you work hard for them and you hope that the outcome will be in their favor. So I do think fondly of him. I hope that whatever happens to him, he has some type of peace in his life.

Interview has been edited and condensed.



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Hi! Thanks for the great information you have provided! You have touched on crucial points!
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skiimaan · 5 years ago

The movie should use a Beatles' song with some lyrical change as movie theme or Al Pacino hums it in the end while being surrounded by

Attracts me like no other lover
Something in the way she woos me
I don't want to leave her now
You know I believe her now
Somewhere in her smile she knows
That I don't need no other lover
Something in her style that shows me
Don't want to leave her now
You know I believe her now
You're asking me will my love grow
I don't know, I don't know
I stick a gun in her mouth it will shoot
I don't know, I don't know
Something in the way she's shot dead
And all I have to do is think of her while in jail
Something in the things she shows me
Don't want to leave her now
You know I believe her now
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Friends of Lana Clarkson · 5 years ago

This false film cooked up by David Mamet, Linda Kenny Baden and producer Barry Levinson is a vile, perversion. Like Spector, this film MURDERS...Murders the TRUTH. We were in the courtroom everyday. This valentine for Phil Spector by an unbelievable irresponsible David Mamet and HBO is a disservice to American jurisprudence, and to all of the dedicated men and women in law enforcement/court system/DA's office who did their best. The evidence was overwhelming and what convicted this odious toad of a man named Pil Spector. The film is an insult to our beloved Lana Clarkson who is portrayed as being responsible for her own death. You cant cop out with a screen notice that the film is fiction when you use real names, venues, press articles and images from the real trial. Edward Lozzi for The Friends of Lana Clarkson

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M.P. · 5 years ago

Al pacino as Phil Spector, this is going to be good. I don't think Phil had a fair trial. The Judge would side with the prosecution most of the time. There was enough proof in that trial to convince me he was innocent. Phil Spector Is a musical Genius and the best music producer of all time. I hope he gets out of jail.

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