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Singer denies being threatened

By Adrienne Drell March 29, 1989 Publication: Chicago Sun-Times Page: 15 Word Count: 320

Singer Dionne Warwick and her manager Tuesday denied ever being threatened by self-styled New York mobster Michael Franzese after Warwick fired booking agent Norby Walters. "Never," Warwick told a federal jury in the fraud trial of Walters and co-defendant Lloyd Bloom.

The husky-voiced entertainer was easily the star witness for the defense as she described a 20-year-long friendship with Walters, a New York agent.

"Sing into the microphone," U.S. District Judge George M. Marovich directed Warwick, who responded, "I don't think you'd want me to today."

The singer recalled meeting Walters at a New York hotel next to the Copacabana nightclub in 1968.

"We were friends," said Warwick.

Both Warwick and her personal agent, Joseph Grant, testified about hiring Walters' firm in the summer of 1982 to line up concerts for \$25,000.

But Warwick wasn't satisfied with Walters' efforts and within a short period "let him go," the singer said.

Warwick said she was not present in late 1982 when Walters and two other men visited Grant in his Los Angeles office.

Franzese, a self-described capo in the New York Colombo crime family, testified earlier that Walters asked him to go to the meeting to muscle Grant.

Franzese recalled that he told Grant, "I would be very appreciative if you keep Norby for at least six months." Franzese said Grant "knew who I was."

Grant, however, recalled a "cordial" conversation with Walters and the two other men, "one wearing a raggedy raincoat," neither of whom delivered a threat.

"Did you ever see or meet the man in this photograph before," asked Walter's attorney, Ethan Levin-Epstein, displaying Franzese' photo.

"No, I have not," responded Grant, who denied telling an FBI agent that "an individual with dark hair said we'd consider it a favor if Dionne stayed with Norby."

Also testifying for the defense Tuesday was Loyola University English professor Timothy Austin, who explained "compensation was remuneration for services" and a "loan" is an item of value furnished with the expectation of return.

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