

Man gets 20 years in musician's murder



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Chris Ferrell, who shot and killed country musician Wayne Mills in Ferrell's bar downtown, is overcome with emotion after he apologized for his actions during his sentencing hearing Friday, April 10, 2015. "I know 'I'm sorry' is not enough." Larry McCormack / The Tennessean



(Photo: (Photo: Larry McCormack / The Tennessean))

Nashville Criminal Court Judge Steve Dozier did not buy Chris Ferrell's claims that Ferrell shot and killed his friend, country musician Wayne Mills, in self-defense.

Dozier sentenced Ferrell to 20 years prison on Friday, splitting the difference between prison terms sought by prosecutors (25 years) and defense attorneys (15 years).

Ferrell, 46, will not be eligible for any reduction of the 20-year term.

Ferrell shot Mills on Nov. 23, 2013 after a tribute concert to music legend George Jones. The two friends had been drinking with others at Ferrell's now-defunct Second Avenue bar downtown, the Pit and Barrel.

Court testimony showed that they began fighting about Mills smoking inside the bar and Mills threatened to kill Ferrell. Ferrell grabbed a gun from the bar and fired three shots. One round hit Mills in the back of the head.

Dozier said based on trial evidence he did not think Ferrell was strongly provoked before the shooting. He cited testimony that Ferrell was 15 to 20 feet away from Mills, who was leaving, and there was a bar in between the two men.

"And we all know about where the gunshot struck him," the judge said of Mills' wound. He also cited the jury's verdict, which found Ferrell guilty of second-degree murder on March 6.

After sentencing, Ferrell's attorney promised to appeal the case and file a motion for a new trial. Ferrell apologized for the shooting in an emotional hearing earlier this month.

Attorney David Raybin said a manslaughter verdict would have been more appropriate in the case. A manslaughter conviction carries a prison term of three to six years, Raybin said. He said police lost and destroyed important evidence.

Raybin said he believed the jury returned the more-serious murder conviction in part because of Ferrell's actions trying to stage the crime scene after the shooting and because of the "botched" police investigation.

"He did not murder his friend," Raybin said of Ferrell. "And we're going appeal that."

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