

## Article: The Goat Gland Film

Contributed by Edward Lorusso

{[comments on]}Talking pictures didn't arrive

overnight. Before "talkies" swept Hollywood and doomed silent films, Thomas Edison and others had been experimenting with adding sound to silent films. And although film history preaches that *Don Juan* (1926) was the first film to have a synchronized track of orchestral music and sound effects and that *The Jazz Singer* (1927) was the first "talkie," neither statement is entirely true. Many short films during the 1920s boasted sound, usually musical numbers that crudely (in a technical sense) featured everything from opera to jazz.

But

once Jolson electrified audiences with his songs and snappy patter (and pulled in more than \$2M in box-office receipts), the transition from silent films to talkies was meteoric. Warners released an astonishing ten all-talking pictures in 1928. Due to the varying resources of the movie studios and varying degrees of enthusiasm for sound films by theater owners (you must remember that the movie theaters had to be wired to show the new talkies), there was a period in the late 1920s when silents, talkies, and part-talkies all co-existed. Astonishingly, by the end of 1929, virtually all films were talkies.

According to a published collection

of lectures given by filmmakers at UCLA in 1929, *Introduction to the Photoplay: A Contemporary Account of the Transition to Sound*, by the end of 1929, the 680 films produced in Hollywood that year broke down into the following categories:

- 335 talkies
- 175 silents
- 75 silents with music and sound effects
- 95 goat gland films

Goat gland? Many silent films

that were finished but unreleased or in production when *The Jazz Singer* became a mega-hit were revamped by a process known as a "goat gland job." "Goat gland" rudely referred to an already completed silent film to which one or more talking sequences or musical numbers were added in an attempt to make the film more marketable to talkie-crazed filmgoers. The term was derived from the bogus treatment for male impotence devised by the infamous Dr. John R. Brinkley. It thankfully vanished from the movie lexicon 80 years ago.

Brinkley began performing his

dubious operations in 1918; he claimed he could restore or enhance male "virility" by implanting portions of goat testicles in the scrotums of male patients—at a cost of \$750. He hired a press agent, advertised in newspapers, and used direct mail to promote his procedure, which he claimed to have performed on more than 16,000 men. Brinkley was the talk of Hollywood, especially when rumors began to circulate about his actor clients. Then came radio.

Brinkley

was praised by the *Los Angeles Times*. When he toured radio station KHJ, owned by the newspaper, he decided that radio could be a great sales tool. In 1923 he opened radio station KFKB (which stood for "Kansas First, Kansas Best") using a 1 kW transmitter; it was the first radio station in Kansas. Typical of early radio, it featured live performances by locals, but more importantly it featured medical talks by Brinkley, including the "Medical Question Box" from which Brinkley would read listeners' medical complaints and suggest treatments over the airwaves. He also got a kickback

for the patent medicines he prescribed.

In 1928 Brinkley's business

came to the attention of Dr. Morris Fishbein, executive secretary of the American Medical Association, who disliked Brinkley as an "advertising doctor." The Kansas City Star, which owned a competing radio station, ran an unfavorable series of reports on him. In 1930 his medical license was revoked by the Kansas State Medical Board, and the Federal Radio Commission refused to renew his station's broadcasting license. He sued the commission, and the case *Brinkley v. FRC* became a landmark case in broadcast law. Brinkley lost.

Both Brinkley and goat gland

films were gone by 1930. The goat gland film was gone for 2 reasons: the studios were all producing "100% all talking pictures" and the backlog of silent films had either been released as silent films, released as "goat gland" films, or simply destroyed. Many unreleased silent films were destroyed after they were totally remade as talkies.\*

\*For example, MGM's

1928 silent version of *Marianne*, starring Marion Davies, Oscar Shaw, and Robert Ames was remade as a talkie and recast with Davies, Lawrence Gray, and Cliff Edwards, with Benny Rubin added for extra comedy and songs. Davies' starring talkie film debuted in 1929.