

## Mae West

One of a kind! Whether they liked her or not, and most people seemed to, there is little question that this short (5') Brooklyn-born nonpareil had a host of admirers back in the nineteen-twenties and thirties. This was a woman who symbolized 'sex', when it wasn't even considered nice to speak the word in polite conversation.

She received her theatrical training in the hey-day of vaudeville in the early 1900's, first performing, singing and dancing at the age of 5. She jumped from vaudeville to Broadway at the age of 18.

Eventually she began writing her own plays, the first of which was entitled, what else, Sex. The play was very popular with the public, but not so with the critics or the city officials, who raided it, closed it, and jailed Mae for eight days, charging indecency.

Her next writing/starring effort was called The Drag, whose subject was homosexuality, and it never even made it to Broadway. After three or four more fairly popular and successful Broadway shows, written and starring her, she penned and headlined in her best known effort, Diamond Lil. This brought her to the attention of Hollywood.

Paramount Studios talked her into signing with them in 1932, throwing in, as an enticement, what in those days was a rarity, the prototype of a motor home. She was an immediate hit with the movie-going public, but not with the screen censors, who had taken control of what audiences were watching at that point. By 1933 she was voted the eighth most popular star in Hollywood, and, by 1935, only William Randolph Hearst, the newspaper publisher, made more money than Mae that year in the entire country.

**It's also safe to say that Mae West saved Paramount from going into bankruptcy during the depression years. Her popularity began to wane in the 40's, and, soon, this master (mistress?) of the double entendre left movies for 25 years. During that period she made numerous appearances around the country in Diamond Lil and occasional radio and television appearances, before returning to the silver screen in Myra Breckinridge in 1970.**

**Mae West died in 1980 at the age of 87. No doubt about it, one of a kind!**