

# Stars with stripes

Following in the footsteps of actor George C. Scott and movie producer Sy Weintraub, new generations of Mizzou Tigers have earned their fame and fortune in the entertainment industry.

BY JOHN BEAHLER



## A peek at the Pitt

Even by Hollywood standards of verbal overkill, the hubbub that surrounds actor **Brad Pitt**, Journ '87, is raising eyebrows. "Brad Pitt is the hottest young heartthrob to hit the screen in years," screams an article in *Vanity Fair* magazine. "The sexiest man alive," says *People*.

Of course, folks in Missouri already knew that Pitt stood out from the crowd. As a student at Mizzou he set more than a few hearts atwitter with his charm and drop-dead good looks.

He's James Dean, Robert Redford and Jack Nicholson all rolled into one. The hoopla stretches all the way back home to Missouri. His parents in Springfield had to get an unlisted phone number after they were deluged with calls. Reporters have pestered former fraternity brothers from his days at Mizzou.

National magazines and TV news programs are talking to Pitt's MU advertising professors for the lowdown on how he headed out to California, just two credits short of graduation. Dr. Birgit Wassmuth, associate professor of journalism, says it happened this way:

Pitt was working with her on an independent project, a calendar called "The Hunks of Mizzou" that was to feature some of MU's best-looking male students. He simply didn't turn the project in. Instead, he made the move to Los Angeles, ostensibly to study advertising.

Pitt paid his movie-making dues working as an extra and playing bit parts. He moved on to television roles and then got his first 15 minutes of fame as the horny hitchhiker in *Thelma and Louise*, then embarked on a string of hit movies that pushed him to the head of the Hollywood pack.

**Mega-star Brad Pitt, left, has set Hollywood on its ear with his stunning popularity on the silver screen.**



He won national recognition for his role as the doomed young reporter, Paul McLean, in *A River Runs Through It*. He played a serial killer in *Kalifornia*, co-starred with Tom Cruise in *Interview With the Vampire*, and drew rave reviews for his portrayal of Tristan in *Legends of the Fall*. Coming up are projects with stars like Morgan Freeman and Bruce Willis.

"This last year, I've been as happy as I've ever been, been miserable, been genius, been humiliated, been congratulated, been put down — I mean, the whole gamut of emotions," Pitt told *Vanity Fair*.

And just for the record, Wassmuth doesn't wring her hands over the fact that Pitt left MU without his sheepskin. "He wouldn't be where he is now if he didn't leave when he did," she says. "He is a very creative person and that means you have to follow your intuition and take a risk."

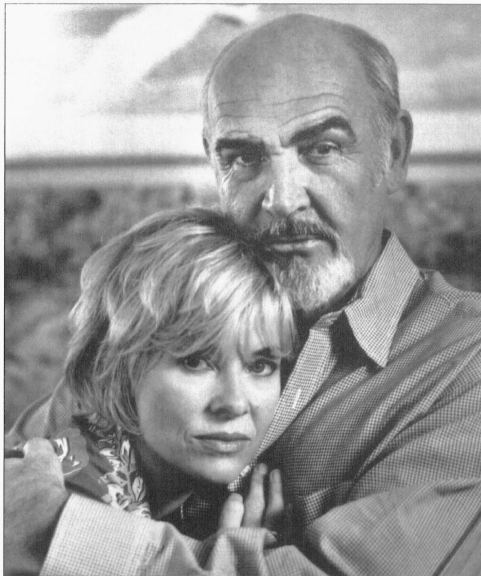
**A former elementary school music teacher in St. Louis, Sheryl Crow's musical talent won her three Grammys this year and is packing concert halls around the country.**

## Crowing on Tuesday nights

Pitt isn't the only MU alumnus who's taken that risk — hit the road for Hollywood and, ultimately, the big time. Singer and songwriter **Sheryl Crow** also took a gamble that paid off.

Crow, BS Ed '84, is topping the charts as one of the hottest acts in the music world. She's done all the TV talk shows. But none of that was a sure thing in 1986 when she quit her job as a music education teacher in St. Louis and headed west for the glitter of Hollywood.

Crow cleaned up at the Grammy awards this year. She grabbed one



**Most recently Kate Capshaw starred in *Just Cause*, opposite Sean Connery.**

Grammy as best new artist and two more for her debut album *Tuesday Night Music Club*. In February, Crow returned to Mizzou to open her national concert tour at Jesse Hall, where she had performed during her MU days as a member of the University Singers.

She was originally from the tiny town of Kennett in the Missouri Bootheel, where her dad, Wendell Crow, AB '54, JD '59, practiced law and her mother gave music lessons. Early on, there were signs that Crow would be a musician. She started playing piano when she was 5 and wrote her first song at age 13.

"I was raised in a very proper Southern family that taught me it was impolite to talk about myself, so I never wrote about my own life," she says. "But when I'd tell

people things that happened to me, they'd all go on about how I had to put them in a song. That was the most important thing I ever learned. After all, I'm a storyteller, and the stories I'm closest to are the ones I can tell the best."

One of her songs, "We Do What We Can," tells the story of her parents' weekly jam sessions with a pick-up band back in Kennett. Her dad sat in with his trumpet when the tune was recorded for Sheryl's album. More recently, Wendell brought down the house when he played a trumpet solo of the song during his daughter's concert at the Fox Theatre in St. Louis.

Even though she had the talent and musical background, like most newcomers, her chances her slim when she left for California nearly a decade ago. Crow almost made it look easy. Within a year she was touring as a back-up singer with Michael Jackson's worldwide *Bad*

album tour. Her songs were recorded by Eric Clapton and Wynonna Judd, and she quickly built a reputation as one of the hottest session singers in the business.

"I don't usually think of myself as a female rock artist. I tour in a pink bus with a bunch of guys and my main man, Scout, who really is a dog. We play video games, talk about guitar strings, cars, sports, relationships, guys, women, the whole gamut," Crow says. "We're a band that's fronted by a woman, true. But we're really artists who are looking for those lost notes and the next idea for a song."

## Capshaw nails career

**K**ate Capshaw is a household name now, but back at Mizzou her friends knew her as Kathy Nail. Capshaw, BS Ed '75, MEd '77, graduated with honors from the College of Education and then taught special education at high schools in Columbia and in nearby Ashland.

Then she saw a friend's photo on the cover of *Glamour* magazine and decided that she should move to New York and give modeling a try. That led to roles on soap operas like *Love of Life* and *The Edge of Night*. By the summer of 1989 she was starring in four different films, which prompted the *New York Post* to dub it "the summer of Kate Capshaw."

During her career she's starred with such film heavyweights as Dudley Moore, Harrison Ford, Richard Gere, Michael Douglas and MU homeboy Tom Berenger. Her films include such box-office hits as *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, *Black Rain* and *Power*.

Capshaw now lives in Los Angeles with her husband, director Steven Spielberg, and their five children. She's never been in higher demand as an actress. Last fall, she starred in *Love Affair*, a remake of the classic film *An Affair To Remember*.

## One designing woman

**L**inda Bloodworth-Thomason graduated with an AB degree in 1969. She was even considering following in her father's footsteps by attending law school at MU. Instead, she traveled out to California one summer with friends and ended up working as a newspaper reporter and teaching English in an inner-city high school. She stayed long enough to get her foot in the door, writing scripts for *M\*A\*S\*H*, and then for *Rhoda* and *Paper Moon*. Eventually she developed and produced some of America's favorite television programs such as *Designing Women* and *Evening Shade*.

It was a long journey for the woman who was once a cheerleader and was voted "most popular" as a student at Poplar Bluff High School. But Bloodworth-Thomason is no stranger to controversy. When she was growing up, she remembers, "You were sent to your room if you didn't have an opinion."

Since 1989, she has sponsored the Claudia Company, headquartered in Poplar Bluff and named in honor of her late mother. The organization provides scholarships for academically talented young women with financial limitations.

Other Claudia Company programs encourage young people to experience great literature and prepare young women for success in college and beyond.

## From J-School to jungles

**A** number of Hollywood heavyweights got their start at MU, even though that might have been the last thing on their minds when they first came to campus. Take actor **Tom Berenger**, for instance.

Berenger, AB '71, was known as Thomas Michael Moore when he came to MU from Chicago with the idea of

Linda Bloodworth-Thomason has had a string of comedy hits on television including her two newest series *Hearts Afire* and *Women of the House*.

becoming a sports writer. That was before he switched his major to theater.

"I did a play here, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*," Berenger recalled when he returned to campus for a visit last fall. "If it had been another play I might not have been as hooked."

But hooked he was; Berenger acted in every play he could while he was at Mizzou. After graduation he made the move to New York City. From the beginning he had steady work as an actor in off-Broadway plays, on soap operas and made-for-TV films.

He got his first big break playing the psychotic killer in *Looking For Mr. Goodbar*. Then there were big successes in such box-office hits as *The Big Chill* and *Platoon*.

For that film about the horrors of the Vietnam War, Berenger went through a little hell of his own. To prepare for *Platoon*, the actors went through two weeks of jungle training that was so grueling several dropped out. "Sometimes your favorite part isn't your favorite experience," he says.

More recently, Berenger had a major role in the *Gettysburg* epic for Ted Turner's TNT network. Last fall he was working on another film for TNT called *Avenging Angel* in which he plays a member of a Mormon vigilante group during Utah's frontier days. As a student of military history, it's a topic that Berenger has researched closely. "You don't see it talked about much in history books, but it's there if you look for it," he says. "Eighty percent of an actor's role is doing his homework." ☐

**Tom Berenger got hooked on acting when he tried out for a play at MU.**

