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Country Music's Tiger

Country music artist and scholar-in-residence Candy Coburn returns to Mizzou.

Story by Kelsey Allen

Photos courtesy of Candy Coburn

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Candy Howard Coburn always knew she was going to be a performer. But the transition from standing in front of a mirror belting Loretta Lynn songs into a hairbrush to a sharing a stage with the likes of Blake Shelton and Miranda Lambert in front of thousands of screaming fans hasn't been easy. In fact, her path to success sounds a little bit like a country song, fitting for the country music artist who returns to MU Nov. 6–8 as the William Francis English Scholar-in-Residence.

Candy Coburn

Candy Coburn, BA '98, is a national performing country music artist who has shared the stage with the likes of Blake Shelton and Miranda Lambert. Released Oct. 18, 2013, her newest album, *Shine*, is entirely acoustic.

Her path starts in her hometown of Murray, Ky., where she grew up listening to gospel music with her grandmother and singing in church.

She found her way to Mizzou, where she attended on a vocal scholarship but quickly remembered that her dream wasn't to teach elementary school music — it was to perform. She dropped out. “Every kid should be thrilled I made that move,” Coburn jokes.

Eventually, she returned to MU. This time, Coburn, BA '98, majored in musical theater and performed during her early years at MU in Homecoming and Greek Week skits and later in theater in productions such as *Into the Woods* and *Nunsense*. The singing came naturally to Coburn; the acting was a stretch.

“[Theater Professor] Jim Miller saw something in me — probably my big mouth,” Coburn says. “Acting was completely new to me, but it got me out of my box.”



Candy Coburn always wanted to be a performer. She got her start at MU in a 1998 production of the musical *Nunsense* where she played the role of Sister Hubert. From left: Becky Brown, BA '97; Gwen Langland, BA '86; Director Jim Miller; Candy Coburn, BA '98; and Marsha Miller.

After graduation, Coburn started down a long and bumpy road to stardom. Without a manager coaching her during her first several years, it took years for her to get out of the dark corners of dive bars and onto major stages. “I didn’t have a mentor,” Coburn recalls. “It was trial and error.”

It wasn’t until music producer Lou Whitney told her she needed to stop playing covers and write her own songs that Coburn got on the right path. Since that fateful conversation in 2001, Coburn has recorded five albums; written songs and jingles for Arby’s and Texas Roadhouse; and became the

celebrity ambassador for Susan G. Komen for the Cure, the achievement Coburn says she is most proud of.

The role came after Coburn co-wrote the song “Pink Warrior,” an anthem she dedicated to her grandmother who fought breast cancer for 10 years. Komen chose it as the theme song for the Global Race for the Cure from 2009-11, and Coburn performed it at 160 shows across 35 states.

“I can headline whatever arena or play with whomever, but being the co-writer of ‘Pink Warrior’ is the most amazing thing I’ve gotten to do,” she says.

After a whirlwind past few years, Coburn is settling down — only slightly — in Springfield, Mo., with her husband and two sons. Her new focus is on mentoring young musicians. Once a week she volunteers at a youth outreach center where she records music with homeless youth and then works in the community to find music venues for them to play live.

“They’ve taught me a ton about how simple life should be,” Coburn says.

“People wonder why I’m not doing 160 shows. There are too many other things I know I’m supposed to be doing.”



Candy Coburn was the celebrity ambassador for Susan G. Komen for the Cure and performed her hit song “Pink Warrior” at 160 stages across 35 states from 2009-11.

The next thing on her to-do list is a trip back to CoMo where she'll serve as this year's William Francis English Scholar-in-Residence, a program of the College of Arts and Science that invites distinguished alumni back to campus to share expertise with students and faculty. It's right up Coburn's alley.

"It was great to learn the way I did because now when I work with young artists, I love being able to sit down and tell them what not to do," she says.

During her stay Nov. 6–8, Coburn will meet with several faculty members to discuss her involvement in a music entrepreneurship program at MU, attend an acting class and a performance studies class, and perform an acoustic storytelling piece off her newest album *Shine* at 7:30 p.m. Nov. 6 in Rhynsburger Theater.

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