

Bon Jovi in first flush,  
1985: Richie Sambora,  
Tico Torres, Jon Bon Jovi,  
Alec John Such, and  
David Bryan (from left)







# BON JOVI

THE NEW JERSEY-BASED BAND'S MULTITUDE  
OF TOP TEN HITS PAID HOMAGE TO HEAVY METAL  
WHILE INCLUDING PERFECT POP HOOKS.

BY ROBERT SANTELLI



In the beginning, the strategy was straightforward and simple: Write well-crafted rock songs with a deliberate pop sheen, play your heart out every time you take the stage, always exceed the expectations of your fans, have fun, and look good. Thirty-four years later, with millions of records sold, a batch of Number One albums and singles, world tours, and international fame, you might say the Bon Jovi plan was a pretty good one.

In fact, it was a *damn* good one. The group's primary members — bandleader, vocalist, songwriter, and guitarist Jon Bon Jovi; lead guitarist and songwriter Richie Sambora; keyboardist David Bryan; drummer Tico Torres; and bass players Hugh McDonald and Alec John Such — achieved the kind of success most bands only dream of.

For Jon Bon Jovi in particular, success went well beyond the stage and studio. With his Hollywood handsome looks, Jon got acting gigs, became an astute businessman, a political activist, and a philanthropist, and proved once again that the promise of rock & roll knows no boundaries.

His was a band that came of age in the eighties, a time when rock was morphing yet again, going beyond the primal push of punk and the cool sway of New Wave. With their more pop-conscious sound, Bon Jovi challenged the old lords of heavy metal, artfully demonstrating how the music could find a home in heavy radio rotation and broaden its fan base like never before.

Jon Bon Jovi was born John Bongiovi in 1962 in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, and raised in nearby Sayreville, a few exits on the Garden State Parkway north of Asbury Park — the spiritual home of Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band, and Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes. His first band was the Atlantic City Expressway, an imitation of the Jukes who played the famed Asbury club the Stone Pony. Next came the popular but short-lived the Rest, which did mostly original songs, followed by John Bongiovi and the Wild Ones. These bands had loyal Jersey Shore followings, but that was it. Bongiovi realized that to reach his goal of securing a record contract, the band's vision had to be his and his alone.









**OPPOSITE PAGE** Performing at Rutgers University, New Jersey, c. 1981. **THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT** Ready to cross the Hudson; Jon Bon Jovi and Bruce Springsteen together for the first — but not last — time at the Fast Lane, Asbury Park, New Jersey, 1980.



## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY



**Bon Jovi**  
1984 (Mercury)



**Slippery When Wet**  
1986 (Mercury)



**New Jersey**  
1988 (Mercury)



**Crush**  
2000 (Mercury)



**Lost Highway**  
2007 (Mercury/Island)



**This House Is Not for Sale**  
2016 (Island)

Using Springsteen's rise to stardom as one of his wells of inspiration and boosted by the mentorship of Southside Johnny, Bongiovi took to the woodshed, writing songs and studying the radio — when not working as a janitor for his second cousin. In this case, his second cousin was Tony Bongiovi, owner of New York's most prestigious studio at the time, the Power Station. Sometime between sweeping floors and running errands, Jon wrote and recorded “Run-away,” which would become his first hit.

“I got the idea for the song when I was at the bus station, on the way to my janitor's gig at the Power Station,” he said. “It all happened from there.” He decided to call his new band Bon Jovi, figuring it sounded a lot like Van Halen. He also changed the ethnic spelling of his last name — and began calling himself Jon Bon Jovi.

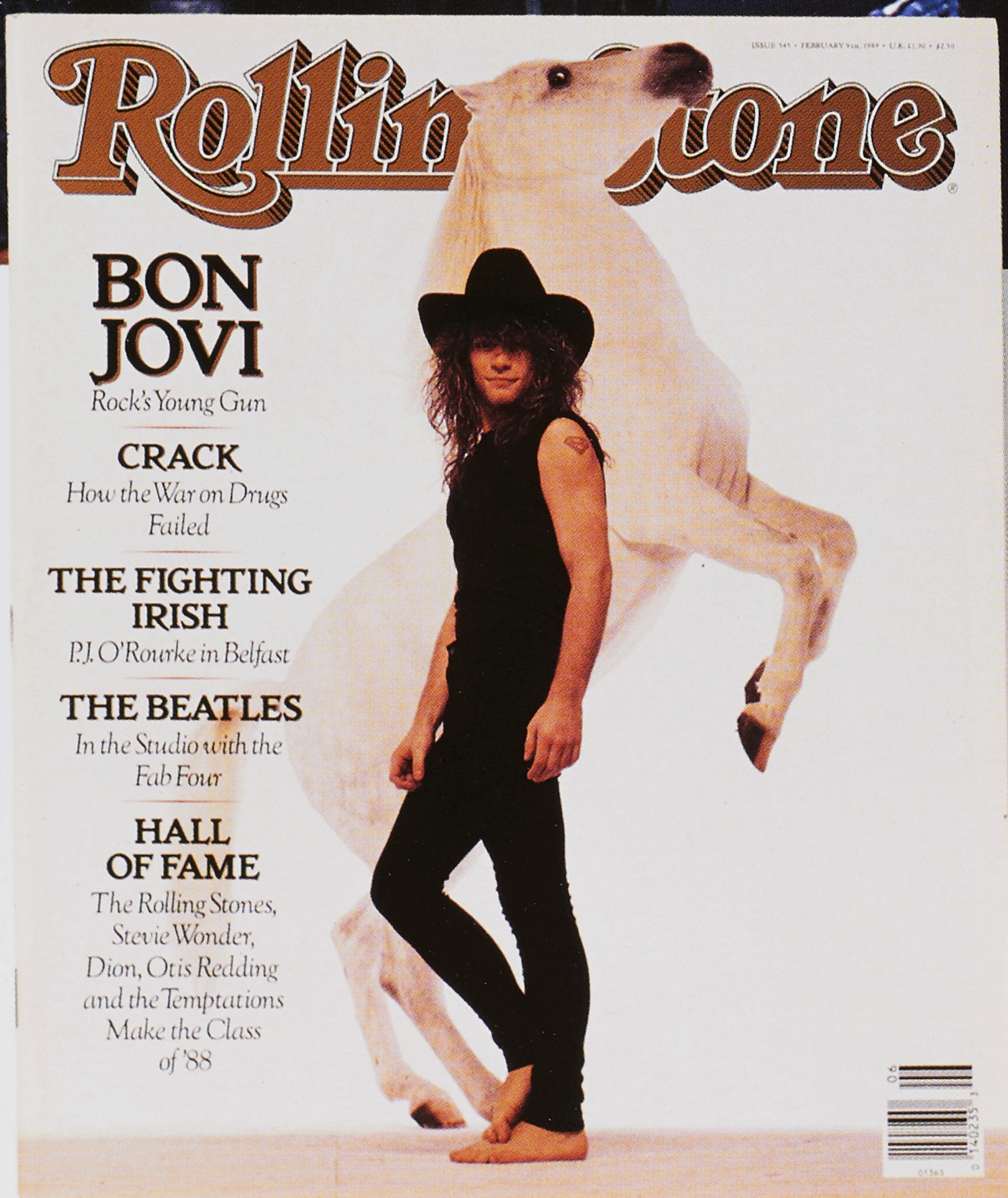
The eponymous debut album, which included “Run-away,” was released in 1984. By this time, guitarist Dave Sabo was replaced by Richie Sambora, whose soaring solos would become one of Bon Jovi's trademarks. Bon Jovi and Sambora quickly became writing partners, hoping to write a followup hit.

Then Lady Luck stepped in. Bon Jovi and Sambora met songwriter Desmond Child after the release of the band's second album, *7800° Fahrenheit* (1985). Child had fronted the band Desmond Child and Rouge — a favorite of Bon Jovi's — and had a keen ear for pop-flavored rock songs. Now writing and working with groups such as Kiss, Child teamed up with Bon Jovi and Sambora. The results would be heard on the band's 1986 monumental breakthrough album, *Slippery When Wet*.

“That record changed the trajectory of the band,” recalled Bon Jovi. “It changed everything. We were now on a completely new level.” With such monster hits as “You Give Love a Bad Name,” “Livin' on a Prayer,” and “Wanted Dead or Alive,” Bon Jovi became superstars, selling out arenas from the United States and Canada to Europe and Japan.

Two of the three Top Ten hits paid homage to heavy metal but included perfect pop hooks: “You Give Love a Bad Name” and “Livin' on a Prayer.” Both became mid-eighties radio staples with videos in heavy rotation on MTV. “Wanted Dead or Alive” proved the band could





also master the power ballad. *Slippery When Wet* was the top-selling album of 1987, spending eight weeks at Number One on the *Billboard* album charts. To date, it has sold over 28 million copies worldwide.

From a distance, it may have looked as though the bar had been set impossibly high. *Slippery*, after all, was only the band's third album. Bringing forth more great songs to prove *Slippery* was no fluke was the next big challenge.

Bon Jovi met it head on — with *New Jersey* (1988). The album nearly matched the success of its predecessor, yielding five more major hits, including a pair of Number Ones — “Bad Medicine” and “I’ll Be There for You” — as well as “Born to Be My Baby,” “Lay Your Hands on Me,” and “Living in Sin.” The band returned to the road, touring for eighteen months. After that, Jon Bon Jovi wrote

music for the film *Young Guns II*, which included yet another Number One single, “Blaze of Glory.”

“The success was amazing, but it nearly killed me,” remembered Bon Jovi. “The writing, the recording, the touring. It was relentless. I pushed it all to the limit.” But the hard work paid off. From that point on, Bon Jovi never looked back. While no other album exceeded or matched the numbers or success of either *Slippery* or *New Jersey*, the band settled in for an incredibly long and fruitful run.

Fans appreciated Bon Jovi’s work ethic and stellar stage shows. On every new album, the band sought to maintain the high quality of songwriting and put forth the earnest studio effort found on its classic works. *Keep the Faith* (1992) featured the ballad “Bed of Roses,” while the best-of collection, *Crossroad* (1994), scored with yet another ballad, “Always.” *These Days* (1995) and Jon Bon Jovi’s first solo album, *Destination Anywhere* (1997), continued the pattern.

Change was in the air, however. Bassist Alec John Such left; Hugh McDonald, who had played bass during the band’s earliest incarnation, returned to replace him. *Crush* (2000) included two more hits, “It’s My Life” and “Thank You for Loving Me.” Then came *Bounce* in 2002, and the acoustic rerelease of the band’s big hits, *This Left Feels Right*, a year later.

Amid all this, the music world had changed. Hip-hop and R&B had pushed rock to the pop music sidelines. A multitude of listeners had discovered country music with its brand-new pop-rock slant. Sales for rock albums slipped. Innovation stalled. Yet, remarkably, Bon Jovi carried on. Their devout and large body of fans continued to support the band’s tours and subsequent releases.

As if to prove their remarkable endurance and ability to change with the times, Bon Jovi released *Have a Nice*





**OPPOSITE PAGE**

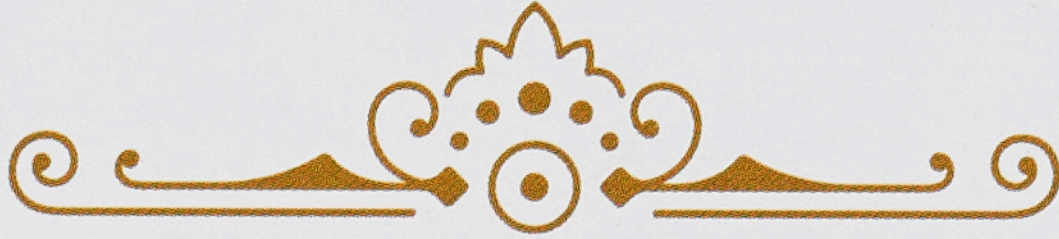
Sambora and Jon Bon Jovi at the MTV Video Music Awards, 1989.

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At the Monsters of Rock festival, Germany, 1986;  
fans in Holland, 1996;  
Jon Bon Jovi in Los Angeles, 1989.







**“IT’S BEEN A LONG RIDE AND CERTAINLY NOT WITHOUT BUMPS IN THE ROAD, BUT IT’S BEEN A GOOD MUSICAL JOURNEY FOR ME, FOR THE BAND, AND, HOPEFULLY, ESPECIALLY FOR OUR FANS.”**



*Day* (2005), featuring “Who Says You Can’t Go Home,” Jon Bon Jovi’s Grammy-winning duet with Sugarland’s Jennifer Nettles. Recognizing a new fan base in country, Bon Jovi put out the chart-topping album *Lost Highway* (2007), which contained collaborations with LeAnn Rimes and Big & Rich. *The Circle* (2009) returned to classic rock themes, followed by another greatest-hits collection (*The Ultimate Collection*) in 2010, and a live album, *Inside Out*, in 2012.

Following the release of *What About Now* in 2013, the longtime partnership between Jon Bon Jovi and Richie Sambora dissolved. Sambora embarked on a solo career and was replaced in Bon Jovi by guitarist Phil X (Phil Xenidis). Determined to keep going, Bon Jovi released

*Burning Bridges* in 2015, followed by *This House Is Not for Sale* in 2016.

“It’s been a long ride and certainly not without bumps in the road,” mused Jon Bon Jovi in a recent interview. “But it’s been a good musical journey for me, for the band, and, hopefully, especially for our fans.”

Bon Jovi’s body of work has stood the test of time. Many of their greatest singles continue in regular rotation on classic-rock radio stations. The band’s concerts still sell out, and the commitment to pen songs that speak directly to its international fan base remains strong.

“I think we did okay,” Bon Jovi recently said of the band’s decades of achievements. Indeed. Tonight, we welcome Bon Jovi into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.





**OPPOSITE PAGE**

A hotel room salute,  
Kansas City, 1989.

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Keeping close with  
friends in blue, 2002;  
Bon Jovi hanging  
with U2's Edge,  
Springsteen, Bono,  
and Usher (from  
left), at President  
Barack Obama's  
first inauguration,  
2009; rocking Miami  
with bassist Hugh  
McDonald in 2016.

