

# Bryan Adams on 'Reckless' Glory Days, One-Dollar Contract

"It was a hell of a rollercoaster to suddenly get on," singer says of his quintuple-platinum 1984 album's smash success

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK Rolling Stone April 9, 2015



Eventpress Kugler/AP

When Bryan Adams phones Rolling Stone, he's about to take the stage at the Ergo Arena in Gdansk, Poland, for the final date of the European leg of the Reckless 30th Anniversary Tour. And how has the tour, a celebration of his blockbuster 1984 album, been going so far? "Great," the 55-year-old Canadian singer and guitarist says, then laughs. "I feel like it hasn't stopped for 30 years."

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And it won't stop, for a good while. For the past few months, Adams has been crisscrossing the globe with Reckless, the chart-topping album that has sold more than 5 million copies in the U.S. since its release, spawned six hit singles — including the indefatigable "Summer of '69" and the lighter-waving power ballad "Heaven" — and made him a superstar at the age of 25. Not bad for a guy who just a few years earlier, in response to critical and commercial indifference, had wanted to title his second album Bryan Adams Hasn't Heard of You Either.

Last year, Universal Music Enterprises issued a four-disc remastered and expanded edition of Reckless, adding demos, audio of a 1985 live show at London's Hammersmith Odeon and other extras to the original 10-track collection. And now, after bringing the anniversary tour everywhere from London to Lithuania, Adams is embarking on a run of U.S. Reckless dates that begin on April 11 in Houston and stretch through the summer. "A lot of these songs are always in my set," he says of the shows, "but now I'm playing the entire album, including the bonus tracks."

As for what Adams recalls when looking back on the Reckless days, he says, "It was a hell of a rollercoaster to suddenly get on." So much so, in fact, that Adams barely remembers performing in front of roughly 100,000 people at Philadelphia's JFK Stadium for Live Aid, which came partway through the Reckless jaunt. "If it wasn't for the clips that are now out there, I'd have virtually no recollection of it — I'd even forgotten that Jack Nicholson introduced me to the

stage." But, he adds, "I do remember turning to my guitarist Keith [Scott] onstage on the first night of the U.S. tour and saying, "What did we do to make this happen?" Keith shrugged his shoulders, but the answer was, it was our time."

Adams continues, "If you think about it, it was really just an incredible moment for music in general. In '84, '85, things were pretty much dominated by Michael Jackson and Bruce Springsteen and Madonna and Prince. So for a little Canadian band to get a week or two at Number One, and do what we did? That was pretty great."

**When Reckless was released in November '84, it spawned early hits in "Run to You" and "Somebody." But it wasn't until "Heaven" and "Summer of '69" came out that things really exploded for you. Until that moment, did it feel like the album cycle may have been coming to an end?**

It's hard to say. I was so immersed in touring that it was sort of hard to gauge what was happening. For the first part of 1985, I was in Europe doing my own shows, and also opening for Tina Turner [who duetted with Adams on the Reckless track "It's Only Love"]. By the time we got to America there had already been a couple singles, but then "Heaven" came out in the summer of '85. That kept the ball rolling along for a while. I think we ended up touring for a few years after that.

**"Heaven" was the album's highest charting single, but "Summer of '69" is the song that has had the greatest resonance through the years.**

Yeah. And certainly internationally. And what's funny is that song never charted in Europe, anywhere. And yet nowadays it's as big as any song in my set.

**Originally you weren't even sure it was going to make the record.**

We wanted it to make the record but it was . . . some songs just needed a bit more work. I cut the song a couple times, demo-ed it three times. We just kept trying to tweak it. It needed to be as good as it could be. I always wanted to write a song that was like [Bob Seger's] "Night Moves." "Summer of '69" was my "Night Moves."

**It was initially going to be called "Best Days of My Life." How did the title switch happen?**

Because of the ad-lib I do at the end ["me and my baby in a '69"]. I'd done that as a joke, really. And then we thought it was catchy.

**The ad-lib qualifies the sexual double entendre.**

Exactly. Then it ended up being written into the song and became the title.

**For Reckless, you and your writing partner, Jim Vallance, would conduct daily songwriting sessions in his basement in Canada.**

For weeks and weeks and months and months, yeah. And it wasn't always fruitful. Sometimes you get it, sometimes you don't. But it was always really fun to go there because it was like, 'OK, today we're going to work from 12 to six, and if we get something, then we'll have some dinner and we'll keep going.' That's how it went. And there was a period, sort of between '83 and '84, where virtually every time we got in there together and wrote a song it would be OK. It would make it somewhere. Either it would be on one of my records or someone else would cut it.

"I just felt that we'd be able to get ourselves out of the shitty clubs and into the better shitty clubs."

**One of the songs, ironically, that didn't make the record and was given to somebody else was the title track, "Reckless."**

Isn't that silly? But here's what happened: I used to do demos, and once I had a demo I would take it to the band. And in the course of making the album I was still doing demos. But by the time I'd written that song and a bunch of the other ones we already had enough songs for an album. And there was no way my label was gonna give me a double album. There was pressure to finish the album and get in out in time for November, and I had to wrap it up. So the first 10 songs are the ones that ended up on the record.

**"Reckless" eventually went to Loverboy, who recorded it as "Dangerous" for their album Lovin' Every Minute of It.**

Yeah, that's right. All the songs that were sort of sitting around in the vaults ended up getting covered by different people.



Frank Lennon/Toronto Star/Getty

**You and Jim wrote for, and had songs recorded by, a wide array of artists back then. Kiss, Ted Nugent, Roger Daltrey . . .**

We were basically guns for hire. We had certain contacts like [producer] Bruce Fairbairn and [songwriter and A&R man John] Carter. Different guys who were making records who would just call us and say, "Hey, you got anything for such and such?" "Yeah, OK, sure." Sometimes the songs were used, and sometimes the songs were rejected and I ended up cutting them myself.

**In the latter category would be "Run to You," the leadoff single from Reckless, which the two of you originally wrote for Blue Öyster Cult.**

Bruce Fairbairn was about to produce them, so we wrote a song that had a kind of jangly guitar part. It never made their record, but I have no idea why. They probably had their own songs.

**When you first got into music, did you envision a career more as a songwriter or an artist?**

Well, I like to sing, so that's really what I wanted to do. And I wanted to be a singer in a band. But then I ended up working with Jim, and Jim didn't want to have anything to do with being in the spotlight. So the idea of being a duo wasn't going to happen. So it was, "OK, I guess it's just gonna be me . . ."

**But you did spend a few years focusing on songwriting for other artists more than being an artist yourself.**

Only because my own albums were going nowhere!

**You started to see some real success with your third album, 1983's Cuts Like a Knife.**

Yeah, and for me, Reckless, when I think about the album now and I think about where my head was at, all I wanted to do was make a record that was as good as Cuts Like a Knife. Because that was the album I was coming off of and that's where my head was at. I had experienced my first Top 10 hit [with the ballad "Straight From the Heart"], and I just kind of felt that

if I could make a record as good as that we'd be able to get ourselves out of the shitty clubs and into the better shitty clubs, you know?

**You certainly achieved that.**

Yeah. But I was so determined to just make the same record again. Because all I had was my imprint of that to go back on. But the thing is, I had a good team. I had Jim helping me write the songs. I had a good band. I had Bob Clearmountain engineering and co-producing. I had a record company that was focused. So by the time Reckless was delivered I had sort of done my homework. I had paid my dues, so to speak.

**As far as paying dues, is it true that when you signed to A&M in 1978, it was for one dollar?**

[Laughs] That's true. Contracts have to have a denomination passed back and forth to make them legal. And because they didn't want to give me any money, one dollar was the minimum amount to make the contract legally binding.

**And that was for how many records?**

For basically as long as they wanted me, really. I think I'm still signed to that contract — although thankfully it was renegotiated!

**So did you ever get that one dollar?**

Yeah. I asked for it. I still have the check somewhere.

**They actually cut you a check?**

That's right. And I'm glad I got it in a check. It proves the absurdity of the whole thing.

**Looking forward, what do you have coming up after this tour?**

I'm just about finished recording a new album. It's being produced by Jeff Lynne. I think it could be the best album I've ever made . . . next to Reckless, of course.