

**Benji Hughes**  
**Songs in the Key of Animals**  
review by: **Becky Huskins**  
photography: **Ellen Gurley**



"Don't fall in love. Not without me," Benji Hughes warns me on his song, "Picnic". Then he manages to swim

through a song with his deep, husky vocals while a light, airy female voice floats alongside chanting "I'm in love with you." Don't fall in love, Benji? Really? You just tell me how, mister! And that's pretty much the best way to sum up Benji's latest release, *Songs in the Key of Animals*, on the North Carolina-based Merge Records label. With its fun, poppy, dance songs and beautiful, lush, love songs, it practically begs you to fall as hard as an eighth grade girl and her Walkman. There's something about the fun songs that take me back to another time. "Sugartree" makes me feel like I'm in the middle of a video game, but "Zebra" makes me want to go back to one of my college's Thursday night dances. (Yes, we had dances, shut-up.) And there is absolutely no good reason I can see why "Peacockin Party" cannot be a massive terrestrial radio hit cemented firmly in the Top 40.

And then there are the love songs. Oh, Benji. "Longshot" makes me lament every unrequited crush I ever had and "Magic Summertime" brings on the daydreams of teen summers in the country. I don't know who "Song for Nancy" was written for, but she is one lucky lady and that is one of the many questions I would ask Benji: just who IS this Nancy?

First off, I know he is a big dude: big personality, big body, big beard, big life. He has been lauded by critics and entertainment outlets for his "A Love Extreme" record as well as his contributions to television shows and commercials. He is loved by friends in the area who grew up with him and have been lucky enough to sit by him in Snug Harbor and other well-haunted venues by the man himself. So it appears that Benji Hughes has become my Queen City Bigfoot: a real-life Sasquatch I can't quite seem to make a face-to-face connection with while other fans and friends see him all the time!

I have so many things to ask. Does he like DJ Lance Rock? How did the recent death of Prince affect him? What would his music be without the influences of 70's and 80's radio? How does he manage to sound like he's ready to party and ready to fall asleep simultaneously? And who, tell me, who is this Nancy????? For now, I will just be happy to listen to *Songs in the Key of Animals* on a loop (a VERY firm loop) and I will try very hard not to fall in love - just like Benji suggests, but if you see him, tell him to call me.

- **Keep up with Benji here:** [www.facebook.com/benjihughesofficial](http://www.facebook.com/benjihughesofficial)
- **Buy the album here:** [www.mergerecords.com/songs-in-the-key-of-animals](http://www.mergerecords.com/songs-in-the-key-of-animals)