

Top 11 of '11, part 1

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As all these lists are, this is a subjective and personal list. But enough about caveats: here are the eleven albums I listened to most in 2011, as enumerated by last.fm¹, which records everything I listen to [except when listening on my telephone, which makes the numbers a serious undercount, but so it goes.]

I've split this into two parts so you have more time to check this stuff out if so inclined. Also, perennials like *Yo-yo Ma rehashes Bach's Cello Concertos* and *The Sundays' Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic* (or, *The perfection of saudade*) kinda go without saying. I also excluded everything from the Mobtown microshows², due to a playlist anomaly; don't let that keep you from downloading the ones from Celebration, Big in Japan, Dustin Wong, Yeveto, We used to be family, and Austin Stahl. I also didn't include Chris Bathgate's *Salt Year*³ because I really just put two tracks on repeat.

11. The Rural Alberta Advantage: Departing I'm surprised that I listened to this more than their 2010 *Hometowns*, but the stats don't lie. By putting rural Alberta in their name, they are saying 'we are a band that sings about loneliness. Our love songs will be lonely love songs. Our perky songs will be about the brief flashes of perk between long stretches of loneliness.' This train-like anthem⁴ is my second most-played (from *Hometowns*).

10. KLF: The chill out album They were so good they inspired me to go and read *The Illuminatus! Trilogy*⁵ (PDF), but despite that I'm keeping it on the list. I really like the sound of lo-fi radio in the distance⁶. It's comforting.

9. Lower Dens: Twin-hand movement Surfer rock run through lots of effects boxes, with a lead whose last few albums were singer-songwriter kinda stuff. I've seen them play at the Kennedy Center⁷ and at a basement show (and saw the guitarist

¹<http://last.fm>

²<http://mobtownstudios.com/microshows/>

³<http://www.npr.org/event/music/141135356/chris-bathgate-tiny-desk-concert>

⁴<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqfMWpyxA64>

⁵http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/archivos_pdf/illuminatus_trilogy.pdf

⁶<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t74BiBmBizk>

⁷<http://www.kennedy-center.org/explorer/videos/?id=M4535>

at a coffee shop in Baltimore—;squee!), so imagine the sort of band that fits into that range.

8. Bon Iver: For Emma I thought his falsetto would get annoying, but it somehow captures saudade with near-Sundays perfection. There's one song where they use autotune which I deleted from my playlist early, and which I can not endorse. I almost have the patter before the music starts at 1:30 memorized⁸.

7. Beangrowers: Not in a million lovers They are a rock and roll trio. They play rock and roll. You can't really tell they're Maltese, but everybody who writes about them mentions this because it's not every day you get to use the word *Maltese*. The voice of the lead singer ("Life's a bitch then she plays in your band") causes me to have a crush on her. Here are clever photographs of her⁹.

6. Velvet Underground: Live, 1969 This is a different experience from the banana album. Frankly, I don't even know who's in the band at this point. It is a live album recorded at what seems like a more laid-back locale—an evening with the Velvet Underground—and when they just take a deep breath and chill out, they sound great. 'Ocean', 'heroin', and even 'Rock and Roll' are really loose baselines for the band to improvise through in jazz quartet style (do a solo or song segment for eight bars, then move on to the next idea for eight bars). Video is unrelated to the audio¹⁰.

⁸<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5Swa9CYgRk>

⁹http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWO_pIcc9Gg

¹⁰<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWBH6i3Gcgg>