

# My picks for best new music

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

December 1, 2011

The *Century's* "Christmas picks" issue is out; it includes my [annotated list](#) of best (popular) music of the year.

I'm a bit self-conscious about my list this year. It more or less screams, "this guy had pretty good taste in music years ago, and he hasn't branched out much in a while." Gillian Welch, the Jayhawks, Tom Waits...old-timers and older-timers all. And even the somewhat newer folks on my list--The Head and the Heart, Fleet Foxes and Liz Janes--could be right out of an algorithm based on my early-aughts iTunes "most played" list. ("If you like Iron and Wine and Sufjan Stevens, you'll *love*..." )

In my defense: it was a great year for folks who came out of '90s alt-country scenes, once my bread and butter. I included Welch and the Jayhawks; I could well have included Wilco (whose new record is their best in years), Lucinda Williams or Ryan Adams. Age-60+ songwriters, too: Waits made the list; Paul Simon almost did. And it was a terrific year for Sub Pop records, the label that made its name in grunge and has since become a trusty standby for all of us who love gently edgy indie pop/folk. Along with The Head and the Heart and Fleet Foxes, Sub Pop releases by [Daniel Martin Moore](#), [Low](#) and the Fruit Bats were on my short list.

In short, an abundance of obvious riches kept me from digging too deep. Not a bad problem to have. (I thought we'd never get another studio record from Waits or Welch; then we got both the same year the Jayhawks got back together.) That said, I'd be glad to hear what you think I overlooked. What are your picks for best of the year?