

# Sorry boys, in 2011 the girls topped my charts



by **Adrian Thrills**

**FROM Kate Bush to Katy B, 2011 was the year when (nearly) all the best music was made by women. Here, in order, are the albums of the year as chosen by the Mail's music critic.**

## 1. ADELE: 21 (XL)

THE singer-songwriter's second album swept everything before it. From humble origins — romantic heartbreak, drunken diary ramblings and a discovery of country music prompted by a bus journey through North America — 21 became a juggernaut. Hurling towards its four millionth sale, it is the tenth best-selling LP this country has ever seen. It also topped the U.S. charts and saw its maker shortlisted for six Grammys.

Adele puts her soul-baring voice to potent use, swerving from the dark, pounding blues of Rolling In The Deep to softer pieces such as Don't You Remember and the signature tune Someone Like You. My album of the year.

## 2. FLORENCE + THE MACHINE: CEREMONIALS (ISLAND)

FLORENCE WELCH made everything bigger and bolder second time around, appealing not just to indie kids and teenage goths who bought her Brit-winning debut, but also to fans of more mature rock.

An impressively theatrical set of songs featured lingering vocal hooks augmented by church bells, twinkling harps, African chants and chugging,

orchestral strings.

It's ludicrously over the top but,

with the choral power-pop of Shake It Out providing a euphoric template, the big arrangements serviced some great songs.

## 3. COLDPLAY: MYLO XYLOTO (PARLOPHONE)

IN A year dominated by female artists, Coldplay showed that there was still a place for four blokes with guitars.

After triumphing at Glastonbury, they came up with an album that married arena-pleasing hooks with a greater awareness of modern pop and urban music. The superb single

Every Teardrop Is A Waterfall is enhanced by propulsive dance rhythms. Elsewhere, it is epic, sing-along business as usual.

## 4. KATE BUSH: DIRECTOR'S CUT (FISH PEOPLE)

MS BUSH was unusually busy in 2011, releasing two albums in a year for the first time since 1978. One was the piano-led 50 Words For Snow, a wintry song cycle. This was the other — a dramatic reworking of songs from 1989's The Sensual World and 1993's The Red Shoes.

The upgrade went beyond mere technical tweaks, with Bush re-

recording all of the singing (her voice is now softer) and doing away with synthetic percussion. Object lesson in growing old gracefully.

## 5. THE PIERCES: YOU & I (POLYDOR)

AMERICAN sisters Catherine and Allison Pierce spurned their indie instincts and went for the rock 'n' roll jugular on their fourth album.

They hooked up with Coldplay bassist Guy Berryman, who produced and played guitar, bass and keyboards, and added swaggering rhythms to their Fleetwood Mac-style harmonies. They were

rewarded with an overdue British



breakthrough that saw *You & I* reach No. 4 in the charts.

### 6. KATY B: ON A MISSION (COLUMBIA)

EVERYONE from Kelly Rowland to J-Lo bolted headlong for the dancefloor this year, but Peckham girl Kathleen Brien was the one who sounded as if she meant it.

A Brit School peer of Adele, the 22-year-old took the futuristic grooves of London's dubstep scene into the mainstream. She had decent pop credentials, too, as she showed on the single *Lights On*.

### 7. BON IVER: BON IVER (4AD)

SINGER-SONGWRITER Justin Vernon began his recording career in a snow-covered log cabin in his native Wisconsin. This beguiling second album finds him opening his eyes to the world.

The songs remained warm and dreamy, but there were also concessions to the mainstream, most notably on *Beth/Rest*, a superior soul ballad that wouldn't have sounded out of place on a Phil Collins LP.

Adele calls this record 'the soundtrack to my heart'.

### 8. LAURA MARLING: A CREATURE I DON'T KNOW (VIRGIN)

WHILE other singers are desperate to be stars, one of the country's strongest young songwriters lurks in the shadows.

Marling's reluctance to promote herself meant her spellbinding third album slipped under the radar. Its myriad charms deserve a wider hearing, with Marling building on her folk roots to embrace rocky guitars, sophisticated vocal harmonies and jazz.

Her vocals evoke Joni Mitchell, while her subtle yet acerbic lyrics are worthy of Bob Dylan.

### 9. JESSIE J: WHO YOU ARE (ISLAND)

THE year's best-selling debut announced the arrival of an Essex pop singer who has turned out to be our answer to Katy Perry.

Bristling with the kind of sassy aplomb that even a broken foot couldn't dent, Jessica Cornish veered so confidently between slick, urban pop and Whitney-style balladry that Justin Timber-

lake called her 'the best singer in the world'.

She proved herself as a songwriter, too, with hits like *Do It Like A Dude*.

### 10. ANNA CALVI: ANNA CALVI (DOMINO)

AT 28, Calvi is the complete package. She has the *femme fatale* looks of a flamenco dancer, the voice of a Forties jazz diva and songs that nod towards the melodramatic Sixties pop Roy Orbison.

But what sets this Putney-based singer-songwriter apart is her guitar work. Her debut mixed intricate finger-picking with long, fiery solos the equal of anything a male guitar hero could produce.





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Year of the woman: Adele (above) Florence Welch (top right), the Pierces (middle right) and Kate Bush

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