

About.com Blues

Share

Various Artists - Saturday Night In Shankletown (2011)

About.com Rating

Be the first to [write a review](#)

By [Reverend Keith A. Gordon](#), About.com Guide

Free Blues Newsletter!

Enter email address

Sign Up

[Discuss in my forum](#)

[Compare Prices](#)

Compilation albums are a hallowed part of the blues tradition, not only in the form of single artist anthologies (after all, early Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and James Cotton albums, to name but a few, were just compilations of early singles) but also as multi-artist collections. Because so many bluesmen-and-women recorded whenever possible for anybody that would put up a wad of cash (regardless of contractual obligations), there are a lot of performances by some surprisingly successful artists that have floated around a shady blues underground marketplace, appearing on numerous quickly out-of-print album releases before disappearing again into the night.



Catbone Music's Saturday Night In Shankletown

Photo courtesy Catbone Music

Saturday Night In Shankletown is one of a series of five blues music comps released by Catbone Music and distributed by MVD Audio. Catbone's Ken Hatley told me that all the songs on the five albums are licensed and legit, and I believe him, and the label has taken great care to re-master the original recordings used on these albums to achieve the best sound quality possible. While I don't believe that there's anything truly previously unreleased here – European blues labels have been mining gold from these scraps for decades with fly-by-night compilations – each of the five Catbone titles has something of merit for the diehard fan and newcomer alike.

Jukin' With The Blues: Saturday Night In Shankletown

Saturday Night In Shankletown opens with a jumpin', jivin' Billy Boy Arnold track. The shuffling, boogie-crazed "I Wish You Could" is a prime slice of Chicago blues streaking out of your speakers to grab your medulla oblongata by the stem and shake it like a Polaroid picture. The horns blare, Arnold's harp squeals with glee, and his vocals are fast-paced and confident. It's a great blues song in any era, and a real live-wire performance.

If one Billy Boy track is good, then two is downright great, and Arnold's "El Dorado" rocks even harder than the opener, stomping and stammering with blasts of mad harp, swinging rhythms, and reckless vocals. By contrast, [Muddy Waters'](#) classic "Forty Days & Forty Nights" is one of those 1950s-era blues standards that has withstood the test of time. While there are no credits in the liner notes, it sounds to me like [Big Walter Horton](#) blowing the harp, though I'd gladly be corrected. No matter, 'cause Waters' vocals are tight, integrated alongside the harp notes to great effect.

James Cotton, Peter Frampton, Michael Bloomfield & the Wolf

[James Cotton's](#) "Jelly Jelly" is a slow-blues heartbreak with muted horns and a jazzy undertone that the tinkling piano keys take into an entirely different emotional realm. Cotton's vocals are mixed a shade lower than the instrumentation, but the power and anguish of the lyrics come through loud and clear. While Peter Frampton may seem an odd inclusion for *Saturday Night In Shankletown*, the guitarist's artistic roots are firmly in the British blues-rock tradition of the 1960s. This cover of the [Rolling Stones'](#) "Loving Cup," taken from an obscure 1999 album Frampton recorded with Canadian R&B singer Nanette Workman, offers up some nice guitarplay behind Workman's coarse, bluesy vocals.

There are few voices in the blues as distinctive as [Howlin' Wolf's](#), and "Going Down Slow," a vintage 1950s-era barn-burner, is primo Wolf. Starting out with a spoken-word intro, the song alternates between talking and shouted vocals as the piano trills loudly behind the singer and guitarist – I'm guessing [Hubert Sumlin](#) – picks out some of the sweetest 100-proof blues licks you'll ever hear. Wolf's odd vocal mix works perfectly, imbuing the song with greater emotional strength. Apart from his role as part of the ground-breaking [Paul Butterfield Blues Band](#), a lot of guitarist [Michael Bloomfield's](#) solo work has been sadly overlooked. "Cherry Red" is one of his signature tunes, a jazz-inflected blues tune that, while suffering here from a poorly-EQ'd mix that nearly buries the vocals, nevertheless displays Bloomfield's immense talents as a blues guitarist with some fine solos that show both great texture and beautiful tone.