



—Globe and Mail, Barrie Davis

Ramblin' Jack Elliott at Mariposa workshop: a diverse group of kids, folk freaks, families and girls in super shorts.

## They come just to play and sing a little

**IT** IS THE NIGHT BEFORE Mariposa and it's chaos. **Joni Mitchell** has just phoned to check her reservation and she's told she doesn't have one. The Mariposa hospitality room is trying to sort out who goes where, keeping over-eager fans away and generally trying to preserve the traditional cool of a folk festival. Joni's room is taken care of and the hotel's name is kept secret at all cost. Apparently there's enough trouble with the press without bringing in kids who want free tickets to the festival.

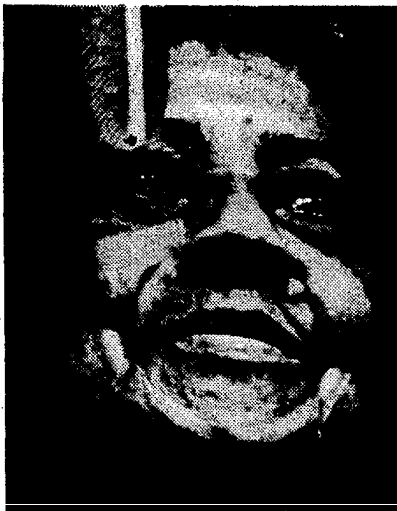
Backstage, or at least down the hall from the super-hippies who are busy organizing, Mariposa's people, the performers, are settling in. They don't care about the details, the hassles. They're just here to play a little and sing a little.

Dick Flohil, the festival's publicity man, is running around, arguing and soothing, debating whether the madness is temporary or permanent. But it's only once a year and it's worth it.

"It's just that the festival's been an abstraction for the last six months and now it's a reality," he explains. "Everyone in town is phoning wanting passes or assuring us that Bob Dylan is definitely coming."

Down the hall from where Flohil is temporarily recuperating with a Southern Comfort, Elizabeth 'Libba' Cotten is sitting quietly in her room. She's 77 and "the heat, honey, is just plain getting to me."

Born in North Carolina and living in Washington, she seems surprised it should be so warm north of the border. But it doesn't really matter because Libba's here for one reason only—"to play and sing some." She'll do her own special song tonight; the song she



Elizabeth Cotten wrote song when she was 12.

wrote when she was 12 in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Freight Train is Libba's song even though not too many people know about it.

But that doesn't matter much either. It's too far back and remembering dates and places isn't Libba's strong point. She doesn't know when she first started picking guitar and banjo, but figures she was pretty young.

"Lord, that's a long time ago. I didn't even have a name when I was a little girl. My father and my mother couldn't decide on what

to call me so he ended up naming me 'babe' and my ma called me 'sis'. When I went to school I just decided to call myself Elizabeth, I don't know why.

"The first guitar I owned was called Stella and the first song I ever learned was Honey Babe, Your Papa Cares for You. I heard a man playing it and I just picked around till I got it right. I learned one string at a time. No one ever taught me nothing."

Then Libba goes. She's off to a party at the Indian Centre and she doesn't want to be late.

Farther down the hall are two types who do what Libba does in a somewhat hipper way. Mississippi Fred McDowell and J. B. Hutto are jamming in their room, debating whether or not they've ever heard of the Mariposa Folk Festival. They conclude they haven't, but it doesn't really matter. They're here with people and playing for people they know, without knowing. Well, after all, playing on an island in the harbor *sounds* like a gas.

Mississippi Fred is going to do a little Delta country blues then let J.B. do it with some Chicago city blues. And in the meantime they don't really feel like talking straight to anybody.

One supposes it's a long way in time and space from Mississippi to the Island but the gap will no doubt be closed when they sing and play for people who disregard barriers. Unlike the current run of rock festivals, the people at Mariposa seem to realize the getting is in the giving. When **Joni Mitchell** is only getting \$75 a day, no one can say anyone else is in it for the money.

They're in it to do it, simply because that's their life. And if they can do it on an island on a summer day and have people listen, "well great, honey, but not necessary."—L.H.