

Freight Train

Words and music by Elizabeth Cotten, Paul James, and Fred Williams



Long a staple of the modern folk-music scene, this song was originally composed by Elizabeth ("Libba") Cotten (1893–1987) when she was a young girl in North Carolina. Decades later, working as a domestic for the family of musicologist Charles Seeger (father of folksingers Pete, Peggy, and Mike), her musical gifts became known and she eventually began a recording and performing career that produced several albums, a National Heritage Fellowship Award, and a Grammy. The copyright to her most famous song, however, was captured by two Britons who heard Peggy Seeger sing the song, adapted it, and registered a copyright for it—a classic and all-too-familiar case of original authorship being trumped by procedure. Despite the Seegers' efforts to help Cotten win the copyright, a long legal battle in the 1950s failed. The song has been recorded well over 100 times

(with substantially varying lyrics), and some versions are credited to Cotten, or Cotten, James, and Williams; but for all intents and purposes Cotten's song is considered to have become public domain, and the James-Williams version is the copyrighted composition.

Mahal plays "Freight Train" as an instrumental, but we've added the lyrics so you can sing along. To play all the melody notes over an F chord (measures 6–7, 22–23, etc.) fret the low F with your thumb. Note how Mahal also occasionally frets the low G in his G chord with the thumb as well (measure 28). The pre-bend throughout (which first occurs in measure 5) requires a half-step bend *before* playing the note. If you have trouble bending all the way up to that E^b note, use your ring, middle, and index fingers to support your pinky.

—PHIL CATALFO AND ANDREW DUBROCK

Intro

F7/C x2x140

E7/B x2x140

♩ = 200

1. 2.

F T34211

C x32010

G 320004

C x32010

Chorus and Verse

C x32010

G 320004

12 Freight train freight train run so fast _____ Freight train freight train

Verses 1–2. See additional lyrics.

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18 run so fast Please don't tell what train I'm on They won't

Instrumental



24 know what route I'm gone




Taj Mahal

42

G 320004 E 023100

49

F T34211 C x32010 G 320004 C x32010 D.S. (first time, no repeat)

56

F7/C x2x140 E7/B x2x140 1-3. 4. F T34211

62

C x32010 G 320004 C x32010 G7sus4 3x401x C x32010 Harm.- |

Chorus

C	G	C	G	C	G
Freight train, freight train, run so fast		1. When I'm dead and in my grave		2. When I die, Lord, bury me deep	
C	C	C	C	C	C
Freight train, freight train, run so fast		No more good time here I crave		Way down on old Chestnut Street	
E7	F	E7	F	E7	F
Please don't tell what train I'm on		Place the stones at my head and feet		So I can hear old "No. 9"	
C	F G C	C	F G C	C	F G C
They won't know what route I'm gone		And tell them all that I'm going to sleep		As she come rolling by	