

## 2021-J2486

Senate Resolution No. 2486

BY: Senator MAY

CONGRATULATING Elizabeth "Libba" Cotten  
posthumously upon the occasion of being inducted  
into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to honor and pay  
just tribute to those musical geniuses whose commitment and creative  
talents contributed to the entertainment and cultural enrichment of  
their community, the State of New York, and the entire Nation; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its  
long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to  
congratulate Elizabeth "Libba" Cotten posthumously upon the occasion of  
being inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame to be celebrated at a  
Ceremony on Saturday, November 5, 2022, at the Microsoft Theater in Los  
Angeles, California; and

WHEREAS, In addition to this monumental honor, Elizabeth Cotten will  
receive the Early Influence Award; and

WHEREAS, Elizabeth Cotten was born to Louisa (Price) and George  
Nevills on January 5, 1893, near Chapel Hill, North Carolina; the  
youngest of five children, she was known as Li'l Sis until she named  
herself on her first day of school; and

WHEREAS, Surrounded by music, Elizabeth Cotten began playing songs

at the young age of eight; one year later, she left school to work; at the age of 12, she had a live-in job as a domestic worker in Chapel Hill, making a dollar a month, which her mother saved up to buy her first guitar from Sears and Roebuck; and

WHEREAS, Elizabeth Cotten taught herself how to play her guitar and became quite proficient, inventing her alternating bass style, "Cotten picking"; a lefty, she played a guitar strung for a right-handed player, upside down, so she could play the bass lines with her fingers and the melody with her thumb; and

WHEREAS, Elizabeth Cotten began to write her own songs, and "Freight Train" was written about a nearby train she could hear from her home; and

WHEREAS, As a teenager, Elizabeth married Frank Cotten, and together, they raised their daughter, Lillie, in several locations before settling in Washington, D.C.; during this time, she gave up her music for her new family and church; and

WHEREAS, Upon divorcing Frank, Elizabeth Cotten moved in with her daughter and her family; in the 1940s, she was hired to work at the house of the Seeger family, which included folk singer Pete Seeger; after playing "Freight Train" for Peggy Seeger, it was falsely copyrighted by two British songwriters and sung on "The Ed Sullivan Show"; and

WHEREAS, With help from the Seeger family, Elizabeth Cotten sued for copyright infringement and picked up her guitar again after 25 years and began to perform publicly for the first time in her 60s; and

WHEREAS, In the later 1950s, Elizabeth Cotten's songs were recorded

by Mike Seeger, and later, became the album Folksongs and Instrumentals with Guitar; many of her songs, including her most famous "Freight Train" were covered by many popular artists of the day; and

WHEREAS, Elizabeth Cotten played her first concert with Mike Seeger at Swarthmore College in 1960, and soon performed many concerts with various folk singers; and

WHEREAS, Elizabeth Cotten wrote and performed more songs, and in 1967, she released a single with her grandchildren, "Shake Sugaree"; after much success, she and her family moved to Syracuse, New York, where she continued to tour and make music; and

WHEREAS, Elizabeth Cotten received her first Grammy award at the age of 90, and was named Syracuse's first Living Treasure in 1983; she was also recognized by the Smithsonian Institution and was named a National Heritage Fellow by the National Endowment for the Arts; and

WHEREAS, In 1987, Elizabeth Cotten died at the age of 92; in recognition of her many contributions to music, a grove named in Elizabeth Cotten's honor was established at the corner of South State and Castle Streets, and is highlighted by a bronze statue of her likeness playing guitar in her famous upside-down style; and

WHEREAS, Elizabeth Cotten has the great honor of being the first person from Syracuse to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, Throughout her storied music career, Elizabeth Cotten has inspired and influenced generations of younger artists through her songwriting, and unique playing style; and

WHEREAS, It is the practice of this Legislative Body to remember the life and many accomplishments of musical greats such as Elizabeth Cotten, whose memorable career will forever live in the hearts of many and continue to inspire generations to come; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to congratulate Elizabeth "Libba" Cotten posthumously upon the occasion of being inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Elizabeth "Libba" Cotten.