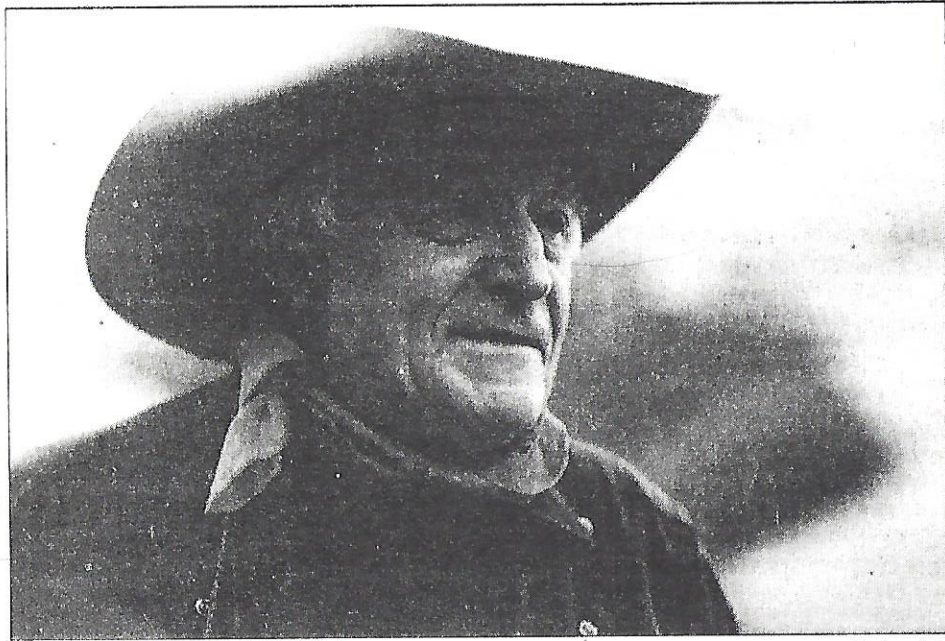


# Ramblin' Jack Elliott performs the 'talkin' blues



Courtesy photo

Ramblin' Jack Elliott will perform Oct. 27 at Swallow Hill Music Association.

## Folk singer to play at Swallow Hill

By Peter Jones  
Staff Writer

Ramblin' Jack Elliott has a way with words — and then some.

"I do like to talk," the wandering folk singer confessed.

Elliott has spent much of his 76 years driving trucks and mobile homes, hitching rides and even jumping a freight train in his quest to see and sing for the world. Even so, his moniker famously refers to his conversation tendencies, not his inclination to travel.

The singing troubadour first acquired his nickname in 1954 when he unexpectedly dropped by the home of his fellow folk singer Odetta.

"Her mom noticed I talked a

### ▼ If you go

Ramblin' Jack Elliott will perform with Rosalie Sorrels Oct. 27 at the Swallow Hill Music Association, 71 E. Yale Ave. Advance tickets are \$25. Call 303-777-1003 or visit [swallowhill.org](http://swallowhill.org).

lot the first time I was there," Elliott recalled, "so when I knocked on the door, she saw who it was and called out, 'Odetta, Ramblin' Jack is here!' The name stuck."

Ask the troubadour about his friend Bob Dylan and he'll relay tales of his ex-wives. Inquire about the decisions that shaped his distinctive life and he tells you about an 80-year-old, flat-bottomed boat he restored.

"A friend of mine brought it out on a truck," Elliott said from his rented home in northern

California. "He was coming out to visit so I didn't have to pay him for the gas. It's about 60 or 70 percent new wood now ..."

True to form, Elliott takes detours in banter, but eventually reaches his destination.

"When we finally completed that job and launched the boat, got in and rowed it around, it was the first time in my life that I felt that I had accomplished anything at all," he said. "It was great to see that dory in the water looking like a brand new boat."

Others disagree with the singer's self-assessment. Elliott has been considered the historical bridge between Woody Guthrie and Dylan. As folk music commercialized, Elliott —

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# Elliott: He will combine his memories in a spoken word CD, due out in 2008

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arguably to the detriment of his career — remained the vagabond American folk singer, an icon defined in the 20th century by Guthrie, the singer's friend and mentor.

Elliott will bring his songs, stories and other diversions — in his truck — to the Swallow Hill Music Association on Oct. 27.

The son of a respected Jewish surgeon, Elliott was born Elliott Adnopoz in Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1931. His neighborhood of Runyonesque characters boasted an old whaler from New Bedford, Mass., and an Irish-American bull rider, among others. Their romantic tales of a world outside Brooklyn captured young Elliott's imagination. A cowboy from Long Island convinced the 15-year-old boy to follow his fanciful dreams.

"I heard a horse going by my house," Elliott said, making a rhythmic hoof sound on the roof of his mouth. "I jumped out of bed and looked out the window and it was a cowboy who looked like he was right out of a Will James novel. I jumped on my bicycle and rode alongside of him for about three miles, interviewing him."

Elliott would soon run away from home to join a traveling rodeo. A musical clown inspired him to learn to play guitar before Elliott's parents tracked down their wayfaring son a few months later — though his fate as a roving folk singer had already been sealed. In 1951, he met and traveled with Guthrie

**He wasn't like any other performer I've ever met. He acted as though he was some kind of fishing boat captain.**

**Jack Elliott**

on folk singer Woody Guthrie

for four years before the ravages of Huntington's chorea debilitated the legendary folk singer.

"He wasn't like any other performer I've ever met," Elliott said. "He acted as though he was some kind of fishing boat captain or something. I loved to listen to him tell stories. I could listen to him yarn by the hour. We played music almost every day."

Elliott paid a price for his hapless travels and free-spirited lifestyle. The casualties included a more lucrative career, five marriages and a distant relationship with his daughter, Aiyana, a filmmaker who in 2000 chronicled her father's exploits in an award-winning documentary, "The Ballad of Ramblin' Jack."

"It was a little embarrassing," Elliott said. "My cowboy friends hated the movie. They said, 'If I had a daughter like that, I'd take her across my knee and spank her.' She kept nagging me, 'Why weren't you there?' Her mother had run off with another man. They stole the Volkswagen bus and left me the dog. That was the best dog I ever had. He could drive a car. I didn't teach him to drive, of course. He learned from watching me."

Elliott's misadventures were

immortalized in a Kris Kristofferson song, "The Pilgrim: Chapter 33," which imagined Elliott as a flawed, but well-intentioned idealist, destined for quick thrills, a short life and failed relationships:

*He has tasted good and evil in your bedrooms and your bars, / And he's traded in tomorrow for today, / Runnin' from his devils, Lord, and reaching for the stars, / And losin' all he loved along the way.*

Elliott will compile the best of his stream-of-consciousness memories onto a spoken-word CD to be released in 2008. Meanwhile, he has recorded Dylan's "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues" for "I'm Not There," an offbeat Dylan biopic slated for release later this year. The film features cameos from actors that range from Richard Gere to Cate Blanchett, all of whom play Dylan at various stages of his life.

Despite his slew of current activities, Elliott cannot get away from his reputation as a drifter who never lived up to his potential. The wife of musician Jerry Jeff Walker recently asked Elliott to lead a seminar at her music school — an attractive offer until she told him what the subject of the discussion would be.

"She wanted to know if I could lecture at the school and tell the students about what mistakes I made in my career," Elliott said.

"I like what you said about 'well-intentioned,'" he said. "Nobody's ever tied it up together so succinctly in a quick little sentence."