

Mbube - Wimoweh - The Lion Sleeps Tonight

Written by bluelover

Tuesday, 20 January 2015 17:40 -

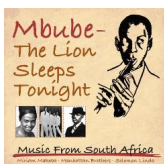
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Mbube is a South African vocal genre, traditionally performed *A cappella* in a powerful and loud way. Mbube appeared in Johannesburg in the 1920s. The word mbube means "lion" in Zulu. The members of the group are male although a few groups have a female singer. In this form, groups of voices singing in unison are employed to create intricate harmonies and textures. It was pioneered by Solomon Linda and was popularized by Miriam as well as the band Ladysmith Black Mambazo in the 1960s.

Mbube or The Lion Sleeps Tonight

For the last 50 years, that happy little word has been a universally recognized shorthand for the song known as “**The Lion Sleeps Tonight.**” From Pete Seeger’s version in 1952 (titled “**Wimoweh**”)

to the Tokens’ No. 1 single in 1961 to its featured role in the hugely popular Disney film and Broadway musical 'The Lion King,' the song has enchanted generations, sold millions of copies and passed into the world’s musical vernacular as a modern folk tune.



Mbube

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But the history of “The Lion Sleeps Tonight” is anything but happy. **"Mbube"** was written in the 1920s by Solomon Linda, a South African singer of Zulu origin.



Solomon Linda - Mbube, 1939 single

Solomon Linda (1909 – 1962) grows up near Ladysmith, Zululand, singing Zulu songs with his friends. Joining other Zulu migrants, Linda and his friends move to Johannesburg to find work. They form a local music group called **the Evening Birds**, and are credited with popularizing the musical form of *isicathamiya*, which combines call-and-response vocal music with a choral sound.



Solomon Linda

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Linda and the Evening Birds record several songs at the Gallo studios. One especially catches the record company's attention: "Mbube," a song inspired by an incident in the band's Zulu childhood when they chased lions that were coming after their fathers' cattle. Because blacks are not allowed to have royalties in 1930s South Africa, the studio gives the band a "petty cash voucher" in exchange for the rights to their song. "Mbube" (recorded 1938) becomes a hit record, selling up to 100,000 copies in the region, and Linda becomes a singing superstar among Zulu migrants in Johannesburg.



Solomon Linda & The Evening Birds

Linda had received 10 shillings—roughly 87 cents today—for signing over the copyright of "Mbube" to Gallo Studios, the company that produced his group's original record. As compensation, they also gave him a job sweeping floors and serving tea in their packing house.



Solomon Linda - Mbube, 1938

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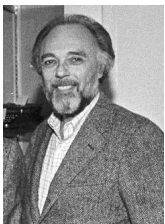
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In 1948 **Pete Seeger**, a young American folk singer living in Manhattan, receives a copy of "Mbube" from his friend Alan Lomax, who is working for a record company. Seeger is fascinated by the song and transcribes it for his band, the Weavers. In 1952, the song was covered as an instrumental by The Weavers as "Wimoweh", a mishearing of the chorus of 'uyimbube' (meaning "he is a lion"), and again in 1959 by The Kingston Trio.



Pete Seeger

For **The Tokens'** 1961 cover, a new set of lyrics, "**The Lion Sleeps Tonight**", was written by George Weiss, Luigi Creatore, and Hugo Peretti, based upon the meaning of the original song. Composer George David Weiss is sent in to re-make the song for the band. Weiss makes Linda's melody the main part and adds the famous lyrics *"In the jungle, the mighty jungle..."*.



George David Weiss

Controversy still remains between The Tokens and Weiss over who was the true author of the song. Drummer Phil Margo claims Weiss stole The Tokens' idea for the cover and inserted his own lyrics, while singer Jay Siegel says: *"George David Weiss was the person who actually did write the lyrics to 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight,' but Solomon Linda is the one who wrote most of the music, and I am the one who wrote all the different parts of that. The second eight bars of 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight' was my melody."*



The Tokens

The Tokens' "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" becomes an international number one hit. Within two years, there had been over 150 cover versions worldwide, in languages from Japanese to Finnish. Linda's name had once again disappeared from the writers' credits.

The song continues to inspire covers by artists such as Brian Eno and Robert John, who releases a number-three hit version in 1972. Every radio play results in a performance royalty: Weiss receives all composer royalties, while Pete Seeger and The Weavers receive the publisher royalties, even though Seeger openly acknowledges Linda as the song's true author. Seeger later sends Linda a check for \$1,000 and instructs his publisher send all future payments to Linda's family—but the company does not.

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The Tokens - The Lion Sleeps Tonight

The South African group **Ladysmith Black Mambazo** releases a version of the song (1994). “The Lion Sleeps Tonight” regains popularity with the Disney film 'The Lion King,' which also becomes a Broadway musical. In July 2004 the song became the subject of a lawsuit between the family of its writer Solomon Linda and Disney. The suit claims that Disney owes \$1.6 million in royalties for its use in the film.



Ladysmith Black Mambazo, 1968

According to South African journalist Rian Malan:

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“ ‘Mbube’ wasn't the most remarkable tune, but there was something terribly compelling about the underlying chant, a dense meshing of low male voices above which Solomon yodelled and howled for two exhilarating minutes, occasionally making it up as he went along. The third take was the great one, but it achieved immortality only in its dying seconds, when Solly [Solomon Linda] took a deep breath, opened his mouth and improvised the melody that the world now associates with these words:

In the jungle, the mighty jungle, the lion sleeps tonight.”



Lion Sleeps Tonight

The Tokens - The lion sleeps tonight

In the jungle, the mighty jungle The lion sleeps tonight In the jungle the quiet jungle The lion sleeps tonight Near the village the peaceful village The lion sleeps tonight Near the village the quiet village The lion sleeps tonight Hush my darling, don't fear my darling The lion sleeps tonight Hush my darling, don't fear my darling The lion sleeps tonight



The Kingston Trio

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Ladysmith Black Mambazo - Mbube (Wimoweh)

*A family lived close to the jungle At the end of the day they all sit together around the fire
They have their supper and relax and talk a little The youngest boy becomes afraid He hears
all the sounds of the wild animals in the forest Cheetahs, wolves jackals and lions He starts
crying at the darkness And wild sounds that fill him with fear Then his mother takes him in her
arms And sings to him The family is always strong together They protect one another
Grandparents, his father and mother Uncles, aunts, cousins brothers and sisters They all join
and sing together Soon he falls asleep, only the beautiful song fills his ears Mbube, mbube,
mbube, mbube Mbube, mbube, mbube, mbube In the jungle, the mighty jungle The lion
sleeps tonight In the jungle, the mighty jungle The lion sleeps tonight Hush, my baby, don't
fear my darling The lion sleeps tonight Hush, my baby, don't fear my darling The lion sleeps
tonight Mbube, mbube, mbube, mbube Mbube, mbube, mbube, mbube Mbube, mbube,
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Lion Sleeps Tonight