



THE LION SLEEPS TONIGHT

THE TOKENS

The original title was "Mbube," which means "lion." It was a hunting song originally sung in Zulu in what is now Swaziland.

This was popularized in the 1930's by South African singer Solomon Linda, who recorded it in 1939 with his group, The Evening Birds. Apparently they were a bold bunch, and got the idea for this from when they used to chase lions who were going after the cattle owned by their families. This was recorded in South Africa, where it was a big hit. Around 1948, the South African record company sent a copy to Decca Records in the US, hoping to get it distributed there. Folk singer Pete Seeger got a hold of it and started working on an English version.

In the 1950's, Miriam Makeba recorded this with the Zulu lyrics, and Pete Seeger recorded it with his band, The Weavers. The Weavers recorded the refrain of the song (no verses) and called it "Wimoweh." Their version hit #15 on the U.S. Best Sellers charts in 1952. In 1957, it was included on, The Weavers At Carnegie Hall, a very popular album in the world of Folk music. Seeger thought they were saying "Wimoweh" on the original, and that's what he wrote down and how it was recorded in English. They were actually saying something like "Uyimbube." In any language, it means absolutely nothing, the equivalent of "shooby dooby" or "doo wop."

Hank Medress, Jay Siegel, and Phil and Mitch Mango, who made up The Tokens, had a Top 15 hit, "Tonight I Fell in Love," in 1960, but didn't have a record label in 1961. They auditioned for producers Hugo and Luigi (Peretti and Creatore) by singing "Wimoweh" to them. Hugh and Luigi were impressed by the performance but decided that the song needed new lyrics. With help from George Weiss, Hugo and Luigi rewrote the song, giving it the title "The Lion Sleeps Tonight." The Tokens were so embarrassed with the new title and lyrics that they fought the release of the recording (it was scheduled to be the B-side of another "import," a Portuguese song that they recorded in the same May 1961 session, "Tina").

Influential disc jockey Murray the K pushed "Tina," but once a New England DJ started playing the B-side on the air, "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" started its climb to the #1 position, hitting the top of the charts in the Christmas holidays of 1961-62. The run at #1 for "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" was interrupted by a unique event: the return to #1 by Chubby Checker's "The Twist" 17 months after it hit the top spot on the Hot 100 for the first time.

The original version by Solomon Linda and the Evening Birds can be found on the album, Crocodiles, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Solomon Linda and The Evening Birds and Others: Mbube Roots—Zulu Choral Music from South Africa, 1930s-1960s.

NO CHORD - JUST SINGING

We-de-de-de, de-de-de-de-de de, we-um-um-a-way
We-de-de-de, de-de-de-de-de de, we-um-um-a-way

F Bb
A wimoweh, a-wimoweh a-wimoweh, a wimoweh

F C
A wimoweh, a-wimoweh a-wimoweh, a wimoweh

F Bb
A wimoweh, a-wimoweh a-wimoweh, a wimoweh

F C
A wimoweh, a-wimoweh a-wimoweh, a wimoweh

F Bb F C
In the jungle the mighty jungle the lion sleeps tonight

F Bb F C
In the jungle the quiet jungle the lion sleeps tonight

NOW REPEAT "WIMOWEH" CHORUS- GO CRAZY WITH IT!!

F Bb F C
Near the village the peaceful village the lion sleeps tonight

F Bb F C
Near the village the quiet village the lion sleeps tonight

AGAIN REPEAT "WIMOWEH" CHORUS- COME ON UKERS LET LOOSE!

F Bb F C
Hush my darling, don't fear my darling. The lion sleeps tonight

F Bb F C
Hush my darling, don't fear my darling. The lion sleeps tonight

REPEAT "WIMOWEH" CHORUS - BY NOW YOU'RE GREAT AT IT!!

THEN - NO CHORD -- REPEAT THE SINGING INTRO AND FADE OUT

