

ONE OF THE GREAT MUSICAL MYSTERIES OF ALL TIME

How American music legends made millions off  
the work of a Zulu tribesman who died a pauper

# IN THE JUNGLE

**ColdType**  
MODERN CLASSICS

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WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD  
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# INTRODUCTION

nce upon a time, a long time ago, a small miracle took place in the brain of a man named Solomon Linda. It was 1939, and he was standing in front of a microphone in the only recording studio in black Africa when it happened. He hadn't composed the melody or written it down or anything. He just opened his mouth and out it came, a haunting skein of fifteen notes that flowed down the wires and into a trembling stylus that cut tiny grooves into a spinning block of beeswax, which was taken to England and turned into a record that became a very big hit in that part of Africa.

Later, the song took flight and landed in America, where it mutated into a truly immortal pop epiphany that soared to the top of the charts here and then everywhere, again and again, returning every decade or so under different names and guises. Navajo Indians sing it at powwows. The French have a version sung in Congolese. Phish perform it live. It has been recorded by artists as diverse as R.E.M. and Glen Campbell, Brian Eno and Chet Atkins, the Nylons and Muzak schlockmeister Bert Kaempfert. The New Zealand army band turned it into a march. England's 1986 World Cup soccer squad turned it into a joke. Hollywood put it in *Ace Ventura Pet Detective*. It has logged nearly three decades of continuous radio airplay in the U.S. alone. It is the most famous melody ever to emerge from Africa, a tune that has penetrated so deep into the human consciousness over so many generations that one can truly say, here is a song the whole world knows.

Its epic transcultural saga is also, in a way, the story of popular music, which limped pale-skinned and anemic into the twentieth century but danced out the other side vastly invigorated by transfusions of ragtime and

rap, jazz, blues and soul, all of whose bloodlines run back to Africa via slave ships and plantations and ghettos. It was in the nature of this transaction that black men gave more than they got and often ended up with nothing.

This one's for Solomon Linda, then, a Zulu who wrote a melody that earned untold millions for white men but died so poor that his widow couldn't afford a stone for his grave. Let's take it from the top, as they say in the trade ...



P A R T O N E

# A STORY ABOUT MUSIC

**T**his is an African yarn, but it begins with an unlikely friendship between an aristocratic British imperialist and a world-famous American Negro. Sir Henry Loch is a rising star of the Colonial Office. Orpheus McAdoo is leader of the celebrated Virginia Jubilee Singers, a combo that specializes in syncopated spirituals. They meet during McAdoo's triumphant tour of Australia in the 1880s, and when Sir Henry becomes High Commissioner of the Cape Colony a few years later, it occurs to him that Orpheus might find it interesting to visit. Next thing, McAdoo and his troupe are on the road in Africa, playing to slack-jawed crowds in dusty mining towns.

This American music is a revelation to "civilized natives," hitherto forced to wear starched collars and sing horrible dirges under the direction of dour white missionaries. Mr. McAdoo is a stern old Bible thumper, to be sure, but there's a subversively rhythmic intensity in his music, a primordial stirring

of funk and soul. The African brothers have never heard such a thing. The tour turns into a five-year epic. Wherever Orpheus goes, “jubilee” music outfits spring up in his wake and spread the glad tidings, which eventually penetrate even the loneliest outposts of civilization.

One such place is Gordon Memorial School, perched on the rim of a wild valley called Msinga, which lies in the Zulu heartland, about 300 miles southeast of Johannesburg. Among the half-naked herd boys who drift through the mission is a rangy kid called Solomon Linda, born 1909, who gets into the Orpheus-inspired syncopation thing and works bits of it into the Zulu songs he and his friends sing at weddings and feasts.

In the mid-Thirties they shake off the dust and cow shit and take the train to Johannesburg, city of gold, where they move into the slums and become kitchen boys and factory hands. Life is initially very perplexing. Solly keeps his eyes open and transmutes what he sees into songs that he and his homeboys perform a capella on weekends. He has songs about work, songs about crime, songs about how banks rob you by giving you paper in exchange for real money, songs about how rudely the whites treat you when you go to get your pass stamped. People like the music. Solly and his friends develop a following. Within two years they turn themselves into a very cool urban act that wears pinstriped suits, bowler hats and dandy two-tone shoes. They become Solomon Linda and the Evening Birds, inventors of a music that will later become known as isicathamiya, arising from the warning cry, “Cothoza, bafana” – tread carefully, boys.

These were Zulus, you see, and their traditional dancing was punctuated by mighty foot stompings that, when done in unison, quite literally made the earth tremble. This was fine in the bush, but if you stomped the same way in town, you smashed wooden floors, cracked cement and sometimes broke your feet, so the whole dance had to be restrained and moderated. Cognoscenti will recall Ladysmith Black Mambazo’s feline and curi-

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ously fastidious movements onstage. That's treading carefully.

In any event, there were legions of careful treaders in South Africa's cities, usually Zulu migrants whose Saturday nights were devoted to epic beer-fueled bacchanalias known as "tea meetings." These were part fashion show and part heroic contest between rival a capella gladiators, often with a stray white man pulled off the street to act as judge and a cow or goat as first prize. The local black bourgeoisie was mortified by these antics. Careful treaders were an embarrassment, widely decried for their "primitive" bawling and backward lyrics, which dwelled on such things as witchcraft, crime and using love potions to get girls. The groups had names like the Naughty Boys or the Boiling Waters, and when World War II broke out, some started calling themselves 'mbombers, after the dive-bombing Stukas they'd seen on newsreels. 'Mbombers were by far the coolest and most dangerous black thing of their time.

Yes! Dangerous! Skeptics are referred to "Ngazula Emagumeni" (on Rounder CD 5025), an early Evening Birds track whose brain-rattling intensity thoroughly guts anyone who thinks of a capella as smooth tunes for mellow people. The wild, rocking sound came from doubling the bass voices and pumping up their volume, an innovation that was largely Linda's, along with the high style and the new dance moves. He was the Elvis Presley of his time and place, a shy, gangly thirty-year-old, so tall that he had to stoop as he passed through doorways. It's odd to imagine him singing soprano, but that was usually his gig in the group: He was the leader, the "controller," singing what Zulus called fasi pathi, a blood-curdling falsetto that a white man might render as first part.

The Evening Birds were spotted by a talent scout in 1938 and taken to the top of an office building in downtown Jo'burg. There they saw the first recording studio in sub-Saharan Africa, shipped out from England by Eric Gallo, a jovial Italian who started in the music business by selling American

hillbilly records to working-class Boers. Before long he bought his own recording machine and started churning out those Dust Bowl ditties in local languages, first Afrikaans, then Zulu, Xhosa and what have you. His ally in this experiment was Griffiths Motsieloa, the country's first black producer, a refined classicist who abhorred this cultural slumming. But what could he do? The boss was determined to sell records to blacks. When Afro-hillbilly failed to catch on, they decided to lay down some isicathamiya and take a leap into the unknown.

Solomon Linda and the Evening Birds cut several songs under Motsieloa's direction, but the one we're interested in was called "Mbube," Zulu for "the lion," recorded at their second session, in 1939. It was a simple three-chord ditty with lyrics something along the lines of, "Lion! Ha! You're a lion!" inspired by an incident in the Birds' collective Zulu boyhood when they chased lions that were stalking their father's cattle. The first take was a dud, as was the second. Exasperated, Motsieloa looked into the corridor, dragooned a pianist, guitarist and banjo player, and tried again.

The third take almost collapsed at the outset as the unrehearsed musicians dithered and fished for the key, but once they started cooking, the song was glory bound. "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 yodeled 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 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.*

Griffiths Motsieloa must have realized he'd captured something special,



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because that chunk of beeswax was shipped all the way to England and shipped back in the form of ten-inch 78-rpm records, which went on sale just as Hitler invaded Poland. Marketing was tricky, because there was hardly any black radio in 1939, but the song went out on “the re-diffusion,” a land line that pumped music, news and “native affairs” propaganda into black neighborhoods, and people began trickling into stores to ask for it. The trickle grew into a steady stream that just rolled on for years and years, necessitating so many re-pressings that the master disintegrated. By 1948, “Mbube” had sold in the region of 100,000 copies, and Solomon Linda was the undefeated and undefeatable champion of hostel singing competitions and a superstar in the world of Zulu migrants.

Pete Seeger, on the other hand, was in a rather bad way. He was a banjo player living in a cold-water flat on MacDougal Street in Greenwich Village with a wife, two young children and no money. Scion of wealthy New York radicals, he’d dropped out of Harvard ten years earlier and hit the road with his banjo on his back, learning hard-times songs for people in the Hoovervilles, lumber camps and coal mines of Depression America. In New York he joined a band with Woody Guthrie. They wore work shirts and jeans, and wrote folk songs that championed the common man in his struggle against capitalist bloodsuckers. Woody had a slogan on his guitar that said, “This machine kills fascists.” Pete’s banjo had a kinder, gentler variation: “This machine surrounds hate and forces it to surrender.” He was a proto-hippie, save that he didn’t smoke reefer or even drink beer.

He was also a pacifist, at least until Hitler invaded Russia. Scenting a capitalist plot to destroy the brave Soviet socialist experiment, Pete and Woody turned gung-ho overnight and started writing anti-Nazi war songs, an episode that made them briefly famous. After that it was into uniform and off to the front, where Pete played the banjo for bored GIs. Discharged in ‘45, he returned to New York and got a gig of sorts in the public school sys-

tem, teaching toddlers to warble the half-forgotten folk songs of their American heritage. It wasn't particularly glorious, the money was rotten, and on top of that, he was sick in bed with a bad cold.

Came a knock on the door, and, lo, there stood his friend Alan Lomax, later to be hailed as the father of world music. Alan and his dad, John, were already famous for their song-collecting forays into the parallel universe of rural black America, where they'd discovered giants like Muddy Waters and Leadbelly. Alan was presently working for Decca, where he'd just rescued a package of 78s sent from Africa by a record company in the vain hope that someone might want to release them in America. They were about to be thrown away when Lomax intervened, thinking, "God, Pete's the man for these."

And here they were: ten shellac 78s, one of which said "Mbube" on its label. Pete put it on his old Victrola and sat back. He was fascinated – there was something catchy about the underlying chant, and that wild, skirling falsetto was amazing.

"Golly," he said, "I can sing that." So he got out pen and paper and started transcribing the song, but he couldn't catch the words through all the hissing on the disk. The Zulus were chanting, "Uyimbube, uyimbube," but it to Pete it sounded like, awimboowee or maybe awimoweh, so that's how he wrote it down. Later he taught "Wimoweh" to the rest of his band, the Weavers, and it became, he says, "just about my favorite song to sing for the next forty years."

This was no great achievement, given that the Weavers' repertoire was full of dreck like "On Top of Old Smoky" and "Greensleeves." Pete will admit no such thing, but one senses he was growing tired of cold-water flats and wanted a proper career, as befitting a thirtysomething father of two. He toned down his politics, excised references to dark sexual lusts from Leadbelly standards, and threw some hokey cowboy songs into the

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mix. He even allowed his wife to outfit the band in matching corduroy jackets, a hitherto-unimaginable concession to showbiz, when they landed a gig at the Village Vanguard.

The pay was \$200 a week plus free hamburgers, and the booking was for two weeks only, but something unexpected happened: Crowds started coming. The gig was extended for a month, and then another. The Weavers' appeal was inexplicable to folk purists, who noted that most of their songs had been around forever, in obscure versions by blacks and rednecks who never had hits anywhere. What they failed to grasp was that Seeger and his comrades had managed to filter the stench of poverty and pig shit out of the proletarian music and make it wholesome and fun for Eisenhower-era squares. Six months passed, and the Weavers were still at the Vanguard, drawing sellout crowds, including the odd refugee from the swell supper clubs of Times Square.

One such figure was Gordon Jenkins, a sallow jazz cat with a gigolo's moustache and a matinee idol's greased-back hairstyle. Jenkins started out arranging for Benny Goodman before scoring a huge hit in his own right with, "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles," an appalling piece of crap. These days he was working with Frank Sinatra, and holding down a day job as musical director at Decca Records. Jenkins loved the Weavers, returning night after night, sometimes sitting through two consecutive shows. He wanted to sign them up, but his bosses were dubious. It was only when Jenkins offered to pay for the recording sessions himself that Decca capitulated and gave the folkies a deal.

Their first recording came out in June 1950. It was "Goodnight Irene," an old love song they'd learned off their friend Leadbelly, and it was an immediate click, in the parlance of the day. The flip side was an Israeli hora called "Tzena, Tzena, Tzena," and it clicked, too. So did "Roving Kind," a nineteenth-century folk ditty they released that November, and even "On Top

of Old Smoky,” which hit Number Two the following spring. The Weavers leapt from amateur hootenannies to the stages of America’s poshest night spots and casinos. They wore suits and ties, Brylcreemed their hair, appeared on TV and pulled down two grand a week. Chagrined and envious, their former comrades on the left started sniping at them in magazines. “Can an all-white group sing songs from Negro culture?” asked one.

The answer, of course, lay in the song that Seeger called “Wimoweh.” His version was faithful to the Zulu original in almost all respects save for the finger-popping rhythm, which was arguably a bit white for some tastes but not entirely offensive. The true test lay in the singing, and here Seeger passed with flying colors, bawling and howling his heart out, tearing up his vocal cords so badly that by the time he reached seventy-five he was almost mute. “Wimoweh” was by far the edgiest song in the Weavers’ set, which is perhaps why they waited a year after their big breakthrough before recording it.

Like their earlier recordings, it took place with Gordon Jenkins presiding and an orchestra in attendance. Before this, Jenkins had been very subdued in his instrumental approach, adding just the occasional sting and the odd swirl of strings to the Weavers’ cheery singalongs. Maybe he was growing bored, because his arrangement of “Wimoweh” was a great Vegas-y explosion of big-band raunch that almost equaled the barbaric splendor of the Zulu original. Trombones blared. Trumpets screamed. Strings swooped and soared through Solomon’s miracle melody. And then Pete cut loose with all that hollering and screaming. It was a startling departure from everything else the Weavers had ever done, but Billboard loved it, anointing it a Pick of the Week. Cash Box said, “May easily break.” Variety said, “Terrific!”

But around this time Variety also said, FIVE MORE H’WOODITES NAMED REDS and CHAPLIN BEING INVESTIGATED. It was January 1952, and America was engaged in a frenzied hunt for Reds under beds. The

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House Un-American Affairs Committee was probing Hollywood. Red Channels had just published the names of artists with Commie connections. And in Washington, D.C., one Harvey Matusow was talking to federal investigators.

Matusow was a weaselly little man who had once worked alongside Pete Seeger in Peoples' Artists, a reddish front that dispatched folk singers to entertain on picket lines and in union halls. Harvey had undergone a change of heart and decided to tell all about his secret life in the Communist underground. On February 6th, 1952, just as "Wimoweh" made its chart debut, he stepped up to a mike before the House Un-American Affairs Committee and told one of the looniest tales of the entire McCarthy era. Evil Reds, he said, were "preying on the sexual weakness of American youth" to lure recruits into their dreaded movement. What's more, he was willing to name names of Communist Party members, among them three Weavers – including Pete Seeger.

The yellow press went apeshit. Reporters called the Ohio club where the Weavers were scheduled to play that night, demanding to know why the Yankee Inn was providing succor to the enemy. The show was canned, and it was all downhill from there. Radio stations banned their records. TV appearances were canceled. "Wimoweh" plummeted from Number Six into oblivion. Nightclub owners wouldn't even talk to the Weavers' agents, and then Decca dropped them too. By the end of the year they'd packed it in, and Pete Seeger was back where he'd started, teaching folk songs to kids for a pittance.

So the Weavers were dead, but "Wimoweh" lived on, bewitching jazz ace Jimmy Dorsey, who covered it in 1952, and the sultry Yma Sumac, whose cocktail-lounge version caused a minor stir a few years later. Toward the end of the decade, it was included on Live From the Hungry I, a monstrously popular LP by the Kingston Trio that stayed on the charts for more than

three years (178 weeks), peaking at Number Two. By now, almost everyone in America knew the basic refrain, so it would have come as no particular surprise to find four nice Jewish teenagers popping their fingers and going ah-weem-oh-way, ah-weem-oh-way in the summer of 1961.

The Tokens were clean-cut Brooklyn boys who had grown up listening to DJs Alan Freed and Murray the K, and the dreamy teen stylings of Dion and the Belmonts and the Everly Brothers. Hank Medress and Jay Siegel met at Lincoln High, where they sang in a doo-wop quartet that briefly featured Neil Sedaka. Phil Margo was a budding drummer and piano player, also from Lincoln High, and Mitch Margo was his kid brother, age fourteen. One presumes that girls were already making eyes in their direction, because the Tokens had recently been on TV's American Bandstand, decked out in double-breasted mohair suits with white shirts and purple ties, singing their surprise Top Twenty hit, "Tonight I Fell in Love."

And now they were moving toward even greater things. Barely out of high school, they landed a three-record deal with RCA Victor, with a \$10,000 advance and a crack at working with Hugo Peretti and Luigi Creatore, ace producers of Jimmy Rodgers, Frankie Lymon and many, many others. These guys worked with Elvis Presley, for God's sake. "To us this was big," says Phil Margo. "Very big."

The Tokens knew "Wimoweh" through their lead singer, Jay, who'd learned it off an old Weavers album. It was one of the songs they'd sung when they auditioned for Huge and Luge, their nickname for the hotshot Italians. The producers said, yeah, great, but what's it about? "Eating lions," said the Tokens. That's what some joker at the South African consulate had told them, at any rate: It was a Zulu hunting song with lyrics that went, "Hush, hush. If everyone's quiet, we'll have lion meat to eat tonight."

The producers presumably rolled their eyes. None of this got anyone anywhere in the era of "shooby doo" and so on. They wanted to revamp

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the song, give it some intelligible lyrics and a contemporary feel. They sent for one George David Weiss, a suave young dude in a navy-blue blazer, presently making a big name for himself in yesterday's music, writing orchestrations for Doris Day, Peggy Lee and others of that sort. The Tokens took him for a hopeless square until they discovered that he'd co-written "Can't Help Falling in Love With You" for Elvis Presley. That changed everything.

So George Weiss took "Wimoweh" home with him and gave it a careful listen. A civilized chap with a Juilliard degree, he didn't much like the primitive wailing, but the underlying chant was OK, and parts of the melody were very catchy. So he dismantled the song, excised all the hollering and screaming, and put the rest back together in a new way. The chant remained unchanged, but the melody – Solomon Linda's miracle melody – moved to center stage, becoming the tune itself, to which the new words were sung: "In the jungle, the mighty jungle" and so on.

In years to come, Weiss was always a bit diffident about his revisions, describing them as "gimmicks," as if ashamed to be associated with so frothy a bit of pop nonsense. Phil Margo says that's because Weiss stole The Tokens' ideas and wrote nothing save thirty-three words of doggerel, but that's another lawsuit entirely. What concerns us here is the song's bloodline, and everyone agrees on that: "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" was a reworking of "Wimoweh," which was a copy of "Mbube." Solomon Linda was buried under several layers of pop-rock stylings, but you could still see him beneath the new song's slick surface, like a mastodon entombed in a block of clear ice.

The song was recorded live in RCA's Manhattan studios on July 21st, 1961, with an orchestra in attendance and some session players on guitar, drums and bass. The percussionist muted his timpani, seeking that authentic "jungle drum" sound. A moonlighting opera singer named Anita Darien prac-

ticed her scales. Conductor Sammy Lowe tapped his baton and off they went, three Tokens doing the wimowehs, while Jay Siegal took the lead with his pure falsetto and Darien swooped and dove in the high heavens, singing the haunting countermelodies that were one of the song's great glories. Three takes (again), a bit of overdubbing, and that was more or less that. Everyone went home, entirely blind as to what they'd accomplished. The Tokens were mortified by the new lyrics, which struck them as un-teen and uncool. Hugo and Luigi were so casual that they did the final mix over the telephone, and RCA topped them all by issuing the song as the B side of a humdrum tune called "Tina," which sank like lead.

Weird, no? We're talking about a pop song so powerful that Brian Wilson had to pull off the road when he first heard it, totally overcome; a song that Carole King instantly pronounced "a motherfucker." But it might never have reached their ears if an obscure DJ named Dick Smith in Worcester, Massachusetts, hadn't flipped the Tokens' new turkey and given the B side a listen. Smith said, "Holy shit, this is great," or words to that effect, and put "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" on heavy rotation. The song broke out regionally, hit the national charts in November and reached Number One in four giant strides.

Within a month, Karl Denver's cover was Number One in England, too. By April 1962 the song was topping charts almost everywhere and heading for immortality. Miriam Makeba sang her version at JFK's last birthday party, moments before Marilyn Monroe famously lisped, "Happy Birthday, Mister President." Apollo astronauts listened to it on the takeoff pads at Cape Canaveral. It was covered by the Springfields, the Spinners, the Tremeloes and Glen Campbell. In 1972 it returned to the charts, at Number Three, in a version by Robert John. Brian Eno recorded it in 1975. In 1982 it was back at Number One in the U.K., this time performed by Tight Fit. R.E.M. did it, as did the Nylons and They Might Be Giants. Manu Dibango



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did a twist version. Some Germans turned it into heavy metal. A sample cropped up on a rap epic titled “Mash up da Nation.” Disney used the song in *The Lion King*, and then it got into the smash-hit theatrical production of the same title, currently playing to packed houses in six cities around the world. It’s on the original Broadway cast recording, on dozens of kiddie CDs with cuddly lions on their covers and on an infinite variety of nostalgia compilations. It’s more than sixty years old, and still it’s everywhere.

What might all this represent in songwriter royalties and associated revenues? I put the question to lawyers around the world, and they scratched their heads. Around 160 recordings of three versions? Thirteen movies? Half a dozen TV commercials and a hit play? Number Seven on Val Pak’s semi-authoritative ranking of the most-beloved golden oldies, and ceaseless radio airplay in every corner of the planet? It was impossible to accurately calculate, to be sure, but no one blanched at \$15 million. Some said 10, some said 20, but most felt that \$15 million was in the ballpark.

Which raises an even more interesting question: What happened to all that loot?



P A R T T W O

# A STORY ABOUT MONEY

**I**t was a wonderful experience,” said Larry Richmond, hereditary president of The Richmond Organization. It was 2a.m. in Johannesburg, and Larry was telling me about his company’s “wonderful efforts” to make sure that justice was done to Solomon Linda. I wanted to hear everything, but we were on opposite sides of the planet, so I said, “Hold it right there, I’m coming to see you.” I hung up, started packing and a few days later, I walked into TRO’s HQ, a strangely quiet suite of offices in Manhattan.

The dusty old guitar in the waiting room was a relic of a long-gone era. Back in the forties, when TRO was young, eager songwriters streamed in here to audition their wares for Larry’s dad, Howie, the firm’s founder. If he liked the songs, he’d sign ‘em up, transcribe ‘em and secure a copyright.

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Then he'd send song pluggers out to place the tunes with stars whose recordings would generate income for the composer and the publisher, too. At the same time, salesmen would be flogging the sheet music, while bean counters in the back office collected royalties and kept an eye out for unauthorized versions.

In its heyday, TRO was a music publishing empire that spanned the globe, but it was forced into decline by the Seventies advent of savvy rock & roll accountants who advised clients to publish themselves, which was fairly easy and doubled one's songwriting income, given that old-style publishers generally claimed fifty percent of royalties for their services. By 1999, TRO was little more than a crypt for fabulously valuable old copyrights, manned by a skeleton crew that licenses old songs for TV commercials or movies.

Larry Richmond was an amiable bloke in an open-necked shirt and beige slacks. We drank coffee and talked for an hour or two, mostly about social justice and TRO's commitment to the same. There were stories about Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, the famous radical troubadours in TRO's stable. There was a story about the hospital in India, to which the Richmonds made generous donations. And finally, there were some elliptical remarks about Solomon Linda, and TRO's noble attempts to make sure that he received his just dues. I was hoping Larry would give me a formal interview on the subject, but first I had get some sleep. It was a mistake. By the time I'd recovered, Larry had changed his mind and retreated into the labyrinth of his voice-mail system, from which he would not emerge.

So there I was in New York, with no one to talk to. I called music lawyers and record companies, angling for appointments that failed to materialize. I wandered into Billboard magazine, where a veteran journalist warned that I was wasting my time trying to find out what any song had ever earned and where the money had gone. But I'd come a long way, so I kept

looking and, eventually, figured some of it out.

The story begins in 1939, when Solomon Linda was visited by angels in Africa's only recording studio. At the time, Jo'burg was a hick mining town where music deals were concluded according to trading principles as old as Moses: record companies bought recordings for whatever they thought the music might be worth in the marketplace; stars generally got several guineas for a session, unknowns got almost nothing. No one got royalties, and copyright was unknown. Solomon Linda didn't even get a contract. He walked out of that session with about ten shillings in his pocket, and the music thereafter belonged to the record company, with no further obligations to anyone. When "Mbube" became a local hit, the loot went to Eric Gallo, the playboy who owned the company. All Solomon Linda got was a menial job at the boss's packing plant, where he worked for the rest of his days.

When "Mbube" took flight and turned into the Weavers' hit "Wimoweh," Gallo could have made a fortune if he had played his cards right. Instead, he struck a handshake deal with Larry Richmond's dad, trading "Mbube" to TRO in return for the dubious privilege of administering "Wimoweh" in such bush territories as South Africa and Rhodesia. Control of Solomon Linda's destiny thus passed into the hands of Howie Richmond and his faithful sidekick, one Albert Brackman.

Howie and Al shared an apartment in the thirties, when they were ambitious young go-getters on Tin Pan Alley. Howie was tall and handsome, Al was short and fat, but otherwise, they were blood brothers, with shared passions for nightlife and big-band jazz. After World War II, Howie worked as a song promoter before deciding to become a publisher in his own right. He says he found a catchy old music-hall number, had a pal write new lyrics and placed the song with Guy Lombardo, who took it to Number Ten as "Hop Scotch Polka." Howie was on his way. Al joined up in 1949, and

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together they put a whole slew of novelty songs on the hit parade. Then they moved into the burgeoning folk-music sector, where big opportunities were opening up for sharp guys with a shrewd understanding of copyright.

After all, what was a folk song? Who owned it? It was just out there, like a wild horse or a tract of virgin land on an unconquered continent. Fortune awaited the man bold enough to name himself as the composer of some ancient tune like, say, “Greensleeves.” A certain Jessie Cavanaugh did exactly that in the early fifties, only it wasn’t really Jessie at all – it was Howie Richmond under an alias. This was a common practice on Tin Pan Alley at the time, and it wasn’t illegal or anything. The object was to claim writer royalties on new versions of old songs that belonged to no one. The aliases seem to have been a way to avoid potential embarrassment, just in case word got out that Howard S. Richmond was presenting himself as the author of a madrigal from Shakespeare’s day.

Much the same happened with “Frankie & Johnny,” the hoary old frontier ballad, or “Rovin’ Kind,” a ribald ditty from the clipper-ship era. There’s no way Al Brackman could really have written such songs, so when he filed royalty claims with the performing rights society BMI, he attributed the compositions to Albert Stanton, a fictitious tunesmith who often worked closely with the imaginary Mr. Cavanaugh, penning such standards as “John Henry” and “Michael Row the Boat Ashore.” Cavanaugh even claimed credit for “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” a feat eclipsed only by a certain Harold Leventhal, who accidentally copyrighted an obscure what-not that turned out to be India’s national anthem.

Leventhal started out as a gofer for Irving Berlin and wound up promoting concerts for Bob Dylan, but in between, he developed a serious crush on the Weavers. In 1949, he showed up at the Village Vanguard with an old friend in tow – Pete Kameron, a suave charmer who was scouting around an entree into showbiz. Leventhal performed some introductions, and

Kameron became the Weavers' manager. Since all these players knew one another, it was natural that they should combine to take charge of the left-wingers' business affairs. Leventhal advised; Kameron handled bookings and tried to fend off the red baiters. Howie and Al took on the publishing, arranging it so that Kameron owned a fifty-percent stake. The Weavers sang the songs and cut the records, and together they sold around 4 million platters in eighteen months or so.

Toward the end of 1951, these men found themselves contemplating the fateful 78 rpm record from Africa and wondering exactly what manner of beast it could be. The label said "Mbube," by Solomon Linda and the Evening Birds, but it had never been copyrighted. Anything not copyrighted was a wild horse, strictly speaking, and wild horses in the Weavers' repertoire were usually attributed to one Paul Campbell. The Weavers' version of "Hush Little Baby" was a Paul Campbell composition, for instance. The same was true of "Rock Island Line" and "Kisses Sweeter than Wine," tunes the folkies had learned off Leadbelly at Village hoots and reworked in their own style.

On the surface of things, Paul Campbell was thus one of the most successful songwriters of the era, but of course the name was just another alias used to claim royalties on songs from the public domain. "Mbube" wasn't public domain at all, but it was the next best thing – an uncopyrighted song owned by an obscure foreign record label that had shown absolutely no interest in protecting Solomon Linda's rights as a writer. So the Zulu's song was tossed in among the Weavers' wild horses, and released as "Wimoweh," by Paul Campbell.

As the song found its fans, money started rolling in. Every record sale triggered a mechanical royalty. Every radio play counted as a performance, which also required payment, and there was always the hope that someone might take out a "synch license" to use the tune in a movie or TV ad.

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Al, Howie and Pete Kameron divided the standard publisher's fifty percent among themselves and distributed the other half to the writers – or in this case, adapters: Pete Seeger and the Weavers. Solomon Linda was entitled to nothing.

This didn't sit well with Seeger, who openly acknowledged Linda as the true author of "Wimoweh" and felt he should get the money. Indeed, he'd been hassling his publishers for months to find a way of paying the Zulu.

"Originally they were going to send the royalties to Gallo," Seeger recalls. "I said, 'Don't do that, because Linda won't get a penny.'" Anti-apartheid activists put Seeger in touch with a Johannesburg lawyer, who set forth into the forbidden townships to find Solomon Linda. Once contact was established, Seeger sent the Zulu a \$1,000 check, and instructed his publisher to do the same with all future payments.

He was still bragging about it fifty years later. "I never got author's royalties on Wimoweh," Seeger says. "Right from '51 or '52, I understood that the money was going to Linda. I assumed they were keeping the publisher's fifty percent and sending the rest." Unfortunately, Linda's family maintains that the money only arrived years later, and even then, it was nothing like the full writer's share Seeger was hoping to bestow.

We'll revisit this conundrum in short order, but first, let's follow the further adventures of "Wimoweh," which fell into the hands of RCA producers Hugo and Luigi by way of the Tokens in the summer of 1961. In addition to being ace producers and buddies of Presley, these men were also wild-horse breakers of the very first rank. They'd put their brand on a whole herd of them – "Pop Goes the Weasel," "First Noel," you name it. They even had "Grand March from Aida," a smash hit for Giuseppe Verdi in the 1870s.

As seasoned pros, these guys would have checked out "Wimoweh" com-

poser of record Paul Campbell and discovered that he was an alias and that his oeuvre consisted largely of folk songs from previous centuries. They seemingly leapt to the obvious conclusion: “Wimoweh” was based on an old African folk song that didn’t belong to anyone. As such, it was fair game, so they summoned George Weiss, turned “Wimoweh” into “The Lion Sleeps Tonight,” and sent it out into the world as a Weiss/Peretti/Creatore composition. They did exactly the same thing four months later with “The Click Song,” a Xhosa tune popularized in America by Miriam Makeba: Weiss cooked up some more doggerel about jungle drums and love-lorn maidens, the Tokens sang it, and it landed in record stores as “Bwanina,” another “original composition” by the same trio.

But they had made a mistake. “The Click Song” was indeed a wild horse that had been roaming Africa for centuries, but “Mbube” was an original, the subject of a US copyright taken out by Gallo back in ‘52 and subsequently traded to TRO in the spectacularly stupid “Wimoweh” deal. When “The Lion Sleeps Tonight” began playing on America’s radios, Howie Richmond instantly recognized its bloodline and howled with outrage. He set his lawyers on The Tokens and their allies, and what could they say? It must have been deeply embarrassing. On the other hand, Howie was on first-name terms with Hugo and Luigi, and deeply respectful of George Weiss’ talents. Howie was thus willing to forget the whole thing – provided the publishing rights to “Lion” came back to him.

Within a week there was a letter acknowledging infringement on Howie’s desk, and urgent settlement talks were underway. Why urgent? Because “The Lion Sleeps Tonight” was soaring up the charts, and the Weiss/Peretti/Creatore cabal was desperate to avoid a dispute that might abort its trajectory. This put Richmond and Brackman in a position to dictate almost any terms they pleased. They didn’t have any legal obligations toward Solomon Linda, but there was nothing to prevent them from mak-



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ing demands on his behalf. They could even have forced Luigi, Hugo and Weiss to settle for a minor adapters' cut and allocated everything else to the Zulu, but this might have soured an important business relationship, and besides, they weren't obliged. So they just allowed three men they were later to describe as "plagiarists" to walk away with 100 percent of the writer royalties on a song that originated in Solomon Linda's brain.

And why not? It was no skin off their teeth. TRO received the full fifty percent publisher's cut. Hugo and Luigi and Weiss were happy. The only person who lost out was Linda, who wasn't even mentioned: the new copyright described "Lion" as "based on a song by Paul Campbell."

The paperwork was finalized on December 18th, 1961, just as the song commenced its conquest of the world's hit parades. It was Number One in the States on Christmas Day, and reached South Africa two months later, just in time to bring a wan smile to the face of a dying Solomon Linda. He'd been ailing since 1959, when he lost control of his bowels and collapsed onstage. Doctors diagnosed kidney disease, but his family suspected witchcraft.

If true, this would make Linda a victim of his own success. Sure, he was nothing in the world of white men, but "Mbube" made him a legend in the Zulu subculture, and to be a legend among "the people of heaven" was a pretty fine destiny in some respects. Strangers hailed him on the streets, bought him drinks in shebeens. He was in constant demand for personal appearances and earned enough to afford some sharp suits, a second bride and a wind-up gramophone for the kinfolk in mud huts back in Msinga.

A thousand bucks from Pete Seeger aside, most of his money came from those uproarious all-night song contests, which remain a vital part of urban Zulu social life to this day. Most weekends, Solly and the Evening Birds would hire a car and sally forth to do battle in distant towns, and they always came back victorious. Competitors tried everything, including

potions, to make their voices hoarse and high like Linda's, but nothing worked. The aging homeboys would take the stage and work themselves into such transports of ecstasy that tears started streaming down Solly's face, at which point the audience would go wild and the Evening Birds would once again walk off with first prize – sometimes a trophy, sometimes money, sometimes a cow that they slaughtered as the sun came up, roasted and shared with their fans. Blinded by the resulting adulation, Linda wasn't particularly perturbed when his song mutated into "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" and raced to the top of the world's hit parades.

"He was happy," said his daughter Fildah. "He didn't know he was supposed to get something."

Fildah is Linda's oldest surviving child, a radiant woman who wears beads in her hair and a goatskin bangle on her right wrist, the mark of a sangoma, or witchdoctor. Her sister Elizabeth works as a nurse in a government clinic, but she announced, giggling, that she was a sangoma, too. A third daughter, Delphi, had just had surgery for arthritis, but she was also using ancestral medicine under her sisters' direction – a plant called "umh-labelo," apparently. Elizabeth thought a water snake might be useful, too, and wondered where she could obtain such a thing. They live in an urban slum but are deeply Zulu people, down to the cattle horns on the roof above the kitchen door – relics of sacrifices to the spirits of their ancestors. Only Elizabeth spoke fluent English, but even she didn't flinch at the talk of witchcraft.

Their aunt, Mrs. Beauty Madiba, was the one who brought it up. A sweet old lady in her Sunday best, she remembered meeting Linda in the late forties, when he started to court her sister Regina. The singer was at the peak of his career at the time, and he had no trouble raising the ten cattle their father was asking as the bride price. The wedding feast took place in 1949, and Regina went to live in Johannesburg. Beauty joined her a few years

later and had a ringside seat when Linda was brought down by dark forces. “People were jealous, because all the time, he won,” she explained. “They said, ‘We will get you.’ So they bewitched him.”

Elizabeth muttered something about renal failure, but even she had to acknowledge there was something odd about the way her father’s disease refused to respond to treatment. He grew so sick that he had to stop singing. By the time “The Lion Sleeps Tonight” was released, he was in and out of the hospital constantly, and on October 8th, 1962, he died.

Everyone sighed. “It was the King Star Brothers and the Five Roses,” growled Victor Madondo, a burly old warrior whose father sang alto in the Evening Birds. “They were happy, because now they could go forward nicely.” But they went nowhere. Linda was the one whose influence lived on, becoming so pervasive that all Zulu male choral singing came to be called “Mbube music.” Ethnomusicologists dug up the early Birds recordings, and Linda was posthumously elevated to godhead – “one of the great figures in black South African music,” according to professor Veit Erlmann of the University of Texas. Latter-day Mbube stars like Ladysmith Black Mambazo sent gifts to this very house when they made it big, a tribute to the spirit of a man they venerated. And then I came along asking questions about money.

It soon became clear that Linda’s daughters had no understanding of music publishing and related arcana. All they knew was that “people did something with our father’s song outside,” and that monies were occasionally deposited in their joint bank account by mysterious entities they could not name. I asked to see documents, but they had none, and they were deeply confused as to the size and purpose of the payments. “Mister Tucker is helping us,” they said. “Mister Tucker knows everything.”

Raymond Tucker is a white lawyer with offices in a grand old colonial mansion on the outskirts of downtown Jo’burg. On the phone, he explained

that intermediaries had contacted him on Pete Seeger's behalf some decades back, asking him to act as a conduit for payments to Linda's widow. Tucker was honored to help out, he said. As we spoke, he flipped through his files, assuring me that royalty payments were "pretty regular, with proper accounting" and that everything was "totally and absolutely above board."

Solomon's daughters didn't contest this, but they rejected Seeger's claim that royalties had been flowing through the Tucker channel since the 1950s. According to their recollections, their father's 1962 death was a catastrophe that left the family destitute. Their mother, Regina, was an illiterate peasant with no job and six children to feed. She illegally brewed and sold African beer to make ends meet. Her girls went to school barefoot, took notes on cracked bits of slate and went to bed hungry. Critical Zulu death rites went unperformed for years, because the family was too poor to pay a sangoma to officiate.

"This house, it was bare bricks," said Elizabeth. "No ceiling, no plaster, no furniture, just one stool and one coal stove." Her eldest brother left school and started working, but he was murdered by gangsters. Her second brother became the breadwinner, only to die in an accident, whereupon Delphi took a job in a factory to keep the family going. "There was suffering here at home," said Elizabeth. She was adamant that the mysterious money "from outside" started arriving only much later, perhaps around 1980. That's when they erected a tombstone for their father, who had rested in a pauper's grave since 1962. That's how they remembered.

I asked Tucker if I could see his files, but he balked, citing his clients' confidentiality. I obtained a letter from the daughters and called to discuss it, but Tucker slammed the phone down, so I wrote a note, pointing out that the daughters were legally and morally entitled to information. In response came a series of letters accusing me of misrepresenting myself as a "white

knight,” when I was clearly just a devious muckraker intent on “writing an article for your own gain.” “I have absolutely no intention of cooperating with a journalist of your type,” he sniffed.

Defeated on that front, I sent an e-mail to Larry Richmond, asking him to clarify the size and nature of TRO’s payments to Linda’s family. “It will take some time to review your letter,” he wrote back. “I hope to get back to you in due course.” Months passed, but nothing happened, so I appealed to Harold Leventhal, the grandfatherly figure who had once managed the Weavers’ affairs. “You’re in a void,” he said, sounding sympathetic. “All you can do is describe it, or you’ll never finish your story.” A wise man would have heeded his advice, but I plodded onward until someone took pity and provided me with a few key documents. Ambiguities remained, but at least I found out why the publishers and their cronies were so coy about making disclosures: it looked as if Linda’s family was receiving 12.5 percent of “Wimoweh” royalties, and around one percent of the much larger revenues generated by “The Lion Sleeps Tonight.”

The payments on “Lion” were coming out of “performance royalties,” jargon for the bucks generated when a song is broadcast. The sums in question averaged around \$275 a quarter in the early Nineties, but who are we to raise eyebrows? Solomon’s family was desperate and grateful for the smallest blessing. The money “from outside” enabled his widow to feed her children and educate the two youngest, Elizabeth and Adelaide. After Regina’s death in 1990, Raymond Tucker set up a joint bank account for the daughters in which small sums of money continued to materialize – never much, but enough to build a tin shack in their back yard and rent it out for extra money, and even start a little shop at the front gate. In American terms, their poverty remained appalling, but in their own estimation, this was a happy ending – until I showed up, and told them what might have been.



PART THREE

# A CURIOUS LAWSUIT

**I**t's November 1991, and we're in a bland conference room in the American Arbitration Association's New York headquarters. At the head of a long table sit three veteran copyright lawyers who will act as judges in these proceedings. Ranged before them are the warring parties: the entire cast of the 1961 "Lion Sleeps Tonight" plagiarism contretemps, either in person or legally represented.

Hugo Perretti died a few years back, but fortune has smiled hugely on the rest of the guys since last we saw them. Howie Richmond published the Rolling Stones and Pink Floyd for a while and is now rich beyond wild imaginings. His sidekick Al Brackman (who got ten percent of all Howie's deals) is rich, too, putters around in boats on weekends and winters at his

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second home near San Diego. Luigi Creatore has retired to Florida on the proceeds of his many hit records, and George Weiss is a successful composer of movie scores and musicals.

So why are they cooped up here, flanked by lawyers? It's another long story.

In the fall of 1989, just as the initial copyright on "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" was about to expire, Howie and Al were notified that George Weiss and his fellow writers would dispense with TRO's services unless they were paid a handsome bonus. Failing this, they'd renew the "Lion" copyright in their own names and thereafter publish the song themselves, thus cutting Howie and Al out entirely. The publishers were incensed, pointing out that "Lion" would never have existed if they hadn't allowed Weiss and Co. to "plagiarize" the underlying music. To which the "Lion" team responded, in effect, how can you accuse us of stealing something you gave us in 1961? The fight went to court in 1990 and wound up in this arbitration months later – two rival groups of rich white Americans squabbling over ownership of the most famous melody ever to emerge from Africa.

The music industry is riveted, because these men are pillars of the show-biz establishment. Al sits on the board of the Music Publisher's Association. Howie founded the Songwriters' Hall of Fame. George Weiss is president of the Songwriters Guild of America and a tireless champion of downtrodden tunesmiths. As such, he can't possibly say that "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" infringes on the work of a fellow composer, so he doesn't. Sure, he says, we "threw the music together" using a "few themes from this Weavers' record," but so what? Weiss said he'd been told that "Wimoweh" was just Pete Seeger's interpretation of "an old thing from Africa," so they hadn't really plagiarized anyone. To prove his point, Weiss produces the liner notes of an old Miriam Makeba record in which "Mbube" is described as "a familiar Zulu song about a lion hunt." TRO counters by playing the miracle take

from Linda's 1939 session, backed up by a yellowing affidavit in which the Zulu swears that "Mbube" was wholly original.

At this juncture Weiss backs down, saying, in essence, gee, sorry, all this is news to me, and the hearing moves on to the real issue, which is the validity of the 1961 contract between TRO and the "Lion" trio. Drawn up in a spirit of mutual admiration, the contract allows the Weiss parties free use of "Wimoweh" and "Mbube" in "The Lion Sleeps Tonight," with no royalty provisions for the author of the underlying songs. The judges seem to find it a bit curious that TRO should now start shouting. "Hold on! Our own contract's inaccurate! The underlying music never belonged to them! They can't just take it!"

Apparently worried that they might not be taken seriously, the men from TRO develop a sudden and barely explicable concern for Solomon's descendants. "The defendants seek to deprive Mr. Linda's family of royalties," cries Larry Richmond, directing the brunt of his attack at George Weiss. The president of the Songwriters' Guild should be "protecting the poor families of songwriters," Larry declares, not robbing them. Stung by these accusations, the Weiss parties say that if they win the case they'll give a share to Solomon's estate. The TRO boys then raise the ante, declaring that the family is rightfully entitled to up to a half of the "Lion's" enormous spoils.

Amazing, no? If TRO had enforced such a distribution from the outset, Solomon's daughters might have been millionaires, but nobody had informed them that this dispute was taking place, so there was no one to laugh (or cry) on their behalf.

The arbitrators weren't very impressed, either – they awarded "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" to Weiss and Co., with the proviso that they send "ten percent of writers' performance royalties" to Soweto. The order came into effect on January 1st, 1992, just as the song set forth on a new cycle of popularity. That very year, a new recording rose to the top of the Japanese hit



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parade. Pow Wow's version made Number One in France in 1993. Then someone at Disney wrote a cute little scene in which a cartoon animals prance hand-in-hand through a forest glade, singing, "In the jungle, the mighty jungle . . ." The song had been used in at least nine earlier movies, but Lion King turned into a supernova. Every kid on the planet had to have the video and the vast array of nursery CDs that went with it.

George Weiss could barely contain his glee. "The song leads a magical life," he told reporters. "It's been a hit eight or nine times but never like this. It's going wild!" The great composer came across as a diffident fellow, somewhat bemused by his enormous good fortune. "The way all this happened was destiny," he said. "It was mysterious, it was beautiful. I have to say God smiled at me."

I was hoping to talk to Weiss about God and Solomon Linda, but his lawyer said he was out of town and unavailable. On the other hand, he was visible in the New York Times' Sunday magazine, which had just run a six-page spread on his awesome retreat in rural New Jersey. I drove out to Oldwick and found the place – an eighteenth-century farmhouse in a deer-filled glade, with a pool and a recording studio in the outbuildings – but Weiss wasn't there. Maybe he was in Santa Fe, where he maintains a hacienda. Or in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, where he and his wife are building a house on a bluff overlooking the sea. Defeated yet again, I returned to my hotel and wrote him a letter. Weiss faxed back, saying he was "distressed" to hear that Solomon had been shabbily treated in the past. "As you can see," he continued, "none of that was our doing. While we had no legal obligation to Mr. Linda whatsoever, when we gained control of our song, we did what we thought was correct and equitable so that his family could share in the profits."

A nice gesture, to be sure, but what did "Lion" earn in the Nineties? A million dollars? Two? Three? Ten? And what trickled down to Soweto?

Judging from tattered scraps of paper in the daughters' possession, ten percent of writer's performance royalties amounted to about \$12,000 over the decade. Handwritten and unsigned, the notes purported to be royalty statements, but there was no detailed breakdown of the song's overall earnings, and Weiss' business people declined to provide one, despite several requests.

Twelve grand was nice money in Soweto terms, but split several ways it changed little or nothing. Solomon Linda's house still had no ceilings, and it was like an oven under the African summer sun. Plaster flaked off the walls outside; toddlers squalled underfoot; three radios blared simultaneously. Fourteen people were living there, sleeping on floors for the most part, washing at an outdoor tap. Only Elizabeth was working, and when she moved out, most of the furniture went with her.

Last time I visited, the kitchen was barren save for six pots and a lone formica table. Linda's youngest daughter, Adelaide, lay swooning under greasy bedclothes, gravely ill from an infection she was too poor to have properly treated. A distant relative wandered around in an alcoholic stupor, waving a pair of garden shears and singing snatches of "Mbube." Elizabeth put her hands to her temples and said, "Really, we are not coping."

All the sisters were there: Fildah, with her sangoma's headdress swathed in a bright red scarf; Elizabeth and Delphi in their best clothes; Adelaide, swaying back and forth on a chair, dazed, sweat pouring down her gaunt cheekbones. I'd come to report back to them on my adventures in the mysterious overseas, bringing a pile of legal papers that I did my best to explain. I told them about Paul Campbell, the fictitious entity who seemed to have collected big money that might otherwise have come their way, and about Larry Richmond, who wept crocodile tears on their behalf in a legal proceeding that might have changed their destiny if only they'd been aware of it. And, finally, I showed them the letter in which George Weiss assured me

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that his underlings were depositing a “correct and equitable” share into the bank account of their mother, “Mrs. Linda,” who had been dead and buried for a decade.

The daughters had never heard of any of these foreigners, but they had a shrewd idea of why all this had happened. “It’s because our father didn’t attend school,” Elizabeth said. “He was just signing everything they said he must sign. Maybe he was signing many papers.” Everyone sighed, and that was that.



#### PART FOUR

# A MORAL IS CONSIDERED

Once upon a time, a long time ago, a Zulu man stepped up to a microphone and improvised a melody that earned in the region of \$15 million. That Solomon Linda got almost none of it was probably inevitable. He was a black man in white-ruled South Africa, but his American peers fared little better. Robert Johnson's contribution to the blues went largely unrewarded. Leadbelly lost half of his publishing to his white "patrons." DJ Alan Freed refused to play Chuck Berry's "Maybellene" until he was given a songwriter's cut. Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love" was nicked off Willie Dixon. All musicians were minnows in the pop-music food chain, but blacks were most vulnerable, and Solomon Linda, an illiterate migrant from a wild and backward place, was

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totally defenseless against sophisticated predators.

Which is not to say that he was cheated. On the contrary, all the deals were perfectly legal. No one forced Linda to sell “Mbube” to Eric Gallo for ten shillings, and if Gallo turned around and traded it at a profit, so what? It belonged to him. The good old boys of TRO were perfectly entitled to rename the song, adapt it as they pleased and allocate the royalties to non-existent entities. After all, they were its owners. Linda was legally entitled to nothing. The fact that he got anything at all seemed to show that the bosses were not without pity.

So I sat down and wrote long letters to George Weiss and Larry Richmond, distancing myself from pious moralists who might see them as sharks and even suggesting a line of reasoning they might take. “The only thing worse than exploitation,” I mused, “is not being exploited at all.” And then I enumerated all the good things old Solomon gained from making up the most famous melody that ever emerged from Africa: ten shillings, a big reputation, adulation and lionization; several cool suits, a wind-up gramophone, a check from Pete Seeger and a trickle of royalties that had spared his daughters from absolute penury.

“All told,” I concluded, “there is a case to be made against the idea that Solomon Linda was a victim of injustice.”

I sat back and waited for someone to make it.

# POSTSCRIPT

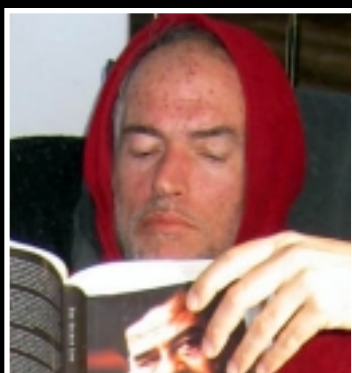
**A**s this piece was going to press, Linda's daughters called in a state of near-hysterical jubilation to report the arrival of fabulous riches in their joint account. We raced to the bank, and there they were – two fat checks from TRO, totalling nearly \$12,000, arising from the use of “Wimoweh” in a US television commercial. The daughters were dumbfounded. It was the most money they'd ever seen. Inquiries revealed that one of the checks had gone at first to Pete Seeger, who had been earning money from the song all along. “I didn't know,” he said, explaining that his business people had for years been diverting his share of “Wimoweh” royalties into a charitable trust, and that it was only when this big check arrived that he realized his earlier version had been mistaken. Chagrined, he returned the windfall to TRO, with instructions that it be sent to Soweto.

This marked the start of somewhat better times for Solomon Linda's daughters. Reporters from all over the world came to visit, and their case became something of a cause celebre. The BBC financed a documentary film about their father. Danish pop star Bamses Venner hired them to sing backup on a new version of “Mbube.” Pete Seeger wrote impassioned letters to the United Nations, demanding reform of international copyright conventions. An advertising agency called The Jupiter Drawing Room sponsored a CD that told the story of the wronged Zulu songwriter in music, and South Africa's Ministry of Arts and Culture convened a task force to look into the matter.

Along the line, Linda's daughter's acquired a new lawyer, a young Afrikaner named Hanro Friedrich who devoted thousands of hours to piecing together a history of the deals that had given white Americans owner-

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ship of the most famous melody ever to emerge from Africa. It was largely as a result of Friedrich's tireless (and entirely unpaid) agitation that Gallo Records and its parent, Johnnic Entertainment, were moved in 2002 to announce a grand gesture of atonement: "We will henceforth administer Linda's daughters' affairs free of charge," said Johnnic CEO Paul Jenkins, "and also place the services of South Africa's most eminent copyright lawyer at their disposal." Dr. Owen Dean has been on the case for almost a year, and is reputed to be discussing a settlement with the Americans. "I think the outlook is positive," Dean told a reporter the other day. "It should be possible to secure royalty payments for the use of Mbube in all its derivatives, including "The Lion Sleeps Tonight," for the benefit of the family." – ***RM, Cape Town, 2003***



**Rian Malan** is an author and journalist who lives in St James, near Cape Town, South Africa. He has a wife (Connie, aka The Contessa) and two dogs and was recently stricken by chicken pox, a disease that can be fatal in adults and moreover cause serious disfigurement, hence the suppurations all over his face in the accompanying picture. "It was remarkable," he says of his disease. "I went off my head and concluded I was the only sane man in Cape Town. "You're all mad," I told the doctor. He wanted to know if I was hearing voices, too, and I said, no, not really, the music accompanying my hallucinations is usually instrumental." Now that he's better, Malan is dabbling in screenplays and tinkering with the manuscript of his long-delayed magnum opus, "Bridges Of Our Own Dead," in which he offers a few modest proposals for the salvation of Africa.

*In The Jungle* won a Da Capo award for Best Music Writing and was a runner up in America's National Magazine Awards for 2001

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