

written by Jews.”<sup>4</sup> Red Army songs of World War II were authored, for instance, by the Russian Jews Isaac Dunayevsky, brothers Dimitri and Daniel Pokrass and others.

### Accent-Free Adoptions—“Nature Boy”

In adoption cases, songwriters are limited in the number of Jewish foundlings they can select. Often the adoption agency puts up a tune that has already gone from one foster song to another, not that it is unwanted, but because evidently there are fewer Jewish orphans available to meet the demand. For example:

Ex. 4-10a

"Nature Boy"  
Eden Ahbez

There was a boy, — A ve-ry strange en -chan -ted boy, — They say he wan-dered ve-ry far, ve-ry far,

This “Nature Boy” of 1948 has a Yiddish counterpart in a *yingele* (youth) of 1935, who suffered in “Russland” and who also wandered until he settled in America, where he had fleeting contentment. Now hear him cry:

Ex. 4-10b

"Shvayg mayn harts"  
Herman Yablokoff

Shvayg mayn harts, — Khotsh dos le - bn iz mir fints - ter shvarts, — Dokh dayn vey-tik muz far bor-gn zayn  
(Be calm, my heart, though life for me is dark, Though you are in pain, You have to hide it)

Was “Nature Boy” made with conscious knowledge of its Yiddish antecedent? This is not simply a matter of tune detection. Just because a song in some way resembles an earlier one does not make it, pro forma, unworthy of a performer, or, worse yet, stolen goods. Still, if it helps to assuage doubting Thomases, some degree of guilt can be established in this case.

Herman Yablokoff, composer of “Shvayg mayn harts,” relates in his memoirs that he brought suit against Eden Ahbez, author of “Nature Boy,” for plagiarizing his song. Ahbez, born Alexander Aberle, was a Jew who as an adult acquired a Yogilike demeanor and repute. Yablokoff tells us Ahbez telephoned him to proclaim his innocence, that he

had heard the melody as if angels were singing it . . . in the California mountains. He offered me \$10,000 to withdraw the suit. I said the money was not important, but I wanted him to admit the song was *geganvet* [stolen]; and if he heard angels, they must have bought a copy of my song.<sup>5</sup>

Both litigants must have thought it over for eventually Ahbez’s lawyers offered, and Yablokoff accepted, \$25,000 for settlement. Next case? There is none—although Antonin Dvořák could have been a party to the suit since the opening strain of the slow movement of his Piano Quartet in A, op. 81 matches that of “Nature Boy.” The DAs of the world, by which I mean District Attorneys, Devil’s Advocates, or Doubting Amoses, may be thinking: “that may have been the situation with an