

= Nature Boy =

" Nature Boy " is a song first recorded by American jazz singer Nat King Cole . It was released on March 29 , 1948 , as a single by Capitol Records , and later appeared on the album , The Nat King Cole Story . The song was written in 1947 by eden ahbez and is partly autobiographical . It is a tribute to ahbez 's mentor Bill Pester , who had originally introduced him to Naturmensch and Lebensreform philosophies , which ahbez practised . When Cole was performing in 1947 at the Lincoln Theater , ahbez wanted to present the song to him , but was ignored . He left the copy with Cole 's valet , and from him the singer came to know of " Nature Boy " . After receiving appreciation for his performance of the song , Cole wanted to record it .

The recording took place on August 22 , 1947 , and featured an orchestra conducted by Frank De Vol ? the in @-@ house arranger of Capitol Records . He used strings and flute as instrumentation in the song , to capture the " enchanting " vibe of the track . The lyrics are a self @-@ portrait of ahbez and his life . The final line ? " The greatest thing you 'll ever learn , Is just to love and be loved in return " ? is considered a poignant moment in the song , with multiple interpretations of it . " Nature Boy " was released amidst the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) ban of 1948 , but became commercially successful , reaching the top of the Billboard music charts and selling over a million copies . Receiving critical acclaim also , " Nature Boy " helped to introduce Cole to a wider audience , especially the white music market , and generated royalties for ahbez . In 1999 , the song was awarded the Grammy Hall of Fame Award . However , " Nature Boy " was also the subject of lawsuits , with Yiddish composer Herman Yablokoff claiming that it was plagiarized from his song " Shvayg mayn harts " (" Hush My Heart ") , which he wrote for his play Papirosn (1935) . In the end , ahbez and Yablokoff settled out of court .

Following Cole 's success with the song , rival record companies released cover versions of " Nature Boy " by other artists like Frank Sinatra and Sarah Vaughan , which were also successful . It ultimately became a pop and jazz standard , with many artists interpreting the song , including Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga , who recorded it for their jazz collaborative album , Cheek to Cheek (2014) . It was also used in numerous films like The Boy with Green Hair , The Talented Mr. Ripley and the 2001 musical , Moulin Rouge ! , for which singer David Bowie recorded a techno version .

= = Background and development = =

In 1941 , a 33 @-@ year @-@ old George McGrew arrived in Los Angeles and began playing piano in the Eutropheon , a small health food store and raw food restaurant on Laurel Canyon Boulevard . The café was owned by John and Vera Richter , who followed a Naturmensch and Lebensreform philosophy influenced by the Wandervogel movement in Germany . Their followers , known as " Nature Boys " , wore long hair and beards and ate only raw fruits and vegetables . McGrew adopted the philosophy and chose the name " eden ahbez " , writing and spelling his name with lower @-@ case letters . It was there , while living in a cave near Palm Springs , that ahbez wrote " Nature Boy " . Partly autobiographical , the song was a tribute to his mentor Bill Pester , who had originally introduced him to Naturmensch and Lebensreform .

In 1947 , at the prompting of Cowboy Jack Patton and Johnny Mercer , ahbez approached Nat King Cole 's manager backstage at the Lincoln Theater in Los Angeles , handed him a tattered copy of " Nature Boy " , and asked him to show it to Cole . However , his pleas were ignored and a disappointed ahbez left the sheet music of " Nature Boy " with Cole 's valet , Otis Pollard . From him , Cole came to know of the song and loved it . Cole began playing " Nature Boy " for live audiences , and he received much acclaim . Irving Berlin , who was present during one of the performances , initially offered to buy the track from Cole , but Cole decided to record it for himself . He needed to get permission from ahbez , however , before releasing it as a single , but he was not able to find the songwriter since ahbez had disappeared without providing any contact details . After ahbez was discovered living under the Hollywood Sign , Cole got his permission and recorded the song .

= = Recording and composition = =

Cole 's recording , which took place on August 22 , 1947 , featured an orchestra conducted by Frank De Vol ? the in @-@ house arranger of Capitol Records . He used strings and flute as instrumentation in the song , to capture the " enchanting " vibe of the track . The first two measures of the song 's melody parallel the melody of the second movement in composer Antonín Dvořák 's Piano Quintet No. 2 (1887) . Written as a pop ballad , " Nature Boy " follows an " A , B " format , with the primary three notes descending on a minor triad above the pickup note . An ascending line over the diminished ii chord returns to the initial minor triad . The harmonic structure makes frequent use of the standard ii ? V ? I progression in the key of D minor . The second 4 @-@ bar section featured a chromatic descending line based on the lowering of the tonic (Dm ? Dmmaj7 ? Dm7 ? Dm6) . The same descending line then continues through Gm6 ? Dm , then finally ending with a whole @-@ step down to the G in the chord Em7 ? 5 .

The lyrics of the song relate to a 1940s Los Angeles @-@ based group called " Nature Boys " , a subculture of proto @-@ hippies of which ahbez was a member . Instrumentalist Chris Tyle noted that the lyrics are a musical self @-@ portrait of ahbez , with the lines like " There was a boy , A very strange , enchanted boy , They say he wandered very far , Very far , over land and sea " . But he believed that it was the song 's last line that made it the most poignant : " The greatest thing you 'll ever learn , Is just to love and be loved in return " . Various interpretations of the line are given by academics , with the eponymous nature boy being a child , advising on love and relationship , or an adult hippie talking about his journey and inner @-@ love . According to author Jeffrey P. Dennis , the song presented a homo @-@ romantic theme , with the eponymous nature boy visiting Cole on a " magic day " and explaining that " the greatest thing you 'll ever learn , is just to love and be loved in return " . Author Raymond Knapp described the track as a " mystically charged vagabond song " whose lyrics evoked an intense sense of loss and haplessness , with the final line delivering a universal truth , described by Knapp as " indestructible " and " salvaged somehow from the perilous journey of life " . According to Joe Romersa , an engineer / drummer in Los Angeles , whom ahbez bequeathed with master tapes , photos , and final works , ahbez wanted a correction made to the lyrics saying " To be loved in return , is too much of a deal , and there 's no deal in love . " , and that instead it should read " The greatest thing you 'll ever learn is to love and be loved , just to love , and be loved . " Romersa has stated that because these lyrics did not fit with the original ending melody , Ahbez re @-@ wrote it .

= = Release and reception = =

In 1948 , a second " Petrillo ban " on music recording was enforced by American Federation of Musicians (AFM) in response to the Taft ? Hartley Act . Capitol Records was desperate to release something for sustaining any profit , and ultimately released " Nature Boy " as a single on March 29 , 1948 , with catalog number 15054 . Crestview Music , which owned publishing right for Cole 's songs , sold the rights for " Nature Boy " to Burke @-@ Van Heusen , who acted as distributor and selling agent . The record debuted on the Billboard charts of April 16 , 1948 , and stayed there for 15 weeks , ultimately peaking at number one . It also reached a peak of number two on the R & B charts . " Nature Boy " went on to sell a million copies in 1948 and Billboard DJs listed it as the greatest record of the year , with the song accumulating a total of 743 points . The 1940s , American music market was divided by race and for a black artist to cross over to mainstream pop music was difficult . Author Krin Gabbard noted in his book *Jammin ' at the Margins : Jazz and the American Cinema* that Cole had to wear white makeup while filming for the performance of the song . Although he had come into prominence in 1930 as a leader of the jazz trio named King Cole Trio , it was with " Nature Boy " that he received widespread recognition , and it was his rendition that appealed to the white audience . Cole would later use the success of the song to cancel the trio and pursue a solo recording career ; he later described " Nature Boy " as one of his favorites among his recordings . The success of the song allowed ahbez to accumulate about US \$ 20 @,@ 000 (\$ 196 @,@ 981 in 2016 dollars) in royalty . However , Billboard reported that ahbez kept only 50 % of the royalty for himself , and distributed the rest among people who had helped him in bringing the song to limelight

. About 25 % was shared with Mrs. Loraine Tatum for helping him with the lyrics and the rest with Pollard , for bringing the song to Cole 's notice .

" Nature Boy " has received wide acclaim from critics and contemporary reviewers . Author Ted Gioia noted in his book , The Jazz Standards : A Guide to the Repertoire , that all the musicians " who had created the golden age of American popular song had their quirks and idiosyncrasies , but ahbez demands pride and place as the most eccentric of them all " . He added that along with promoting the hippie culture , with " Nature Boy " , ahbez and Cole was able to introduce a new era of black artists in white popular music . In his book Sinatra ! the Song is You : A Singer 's Art , author Will Friedwald complimented Cole 's version , saying that it had been the " startlingly fresh " combination of the singer 's vocals along with the string section , which had made " Nature Boy " a hit . Stephen Cook from AllMusic said that the song transformed Cole into " one of the most famous and beloved pop singing stars of the postwar years . " Billboard noted that such was the popularity of the song that audiences would only stay in theaters to see Cole perform " Nature Boy " , and leave once he finished . A 1975 poll by the magazine listed it as the " Greatest All @-@ Round Record " as well as the " Favorite Pop Recording " of the previous years . In 1999 , the song was awarded the Grammy Hall of Fame , a special Grammy Award established in 1973 to honor recordings that are at least twenty @-@ five years old and that have " qualitative or historical significance " . Steve Erickson from Los Angeles magazine gave a detailed positive review of the song :

" Nature Boy " is so otherworldly in its melody and lyric that any number of interpretations over the decades , from Nat Cole 's to Alex Chilton 's , have never been able to make it ordinary . It sounds like something that , from the minute it was written , existed out of time and place ? all thousand and one Arabian Nights compressed into two and a half minutes as mediated by a cracked Mojave Debussy slugging down the last of the absinthe from his canteen .

Yiddish theatre composer Herman Yablokoff claimed in his biography , Memoirs of the Yiddish Stage , that the melody to " Nature Boy " was plagiarized from his song " Shvayg mayn harts " (" Hush My Heart ") , which he wrote for his play Papirosn (1935) . When met with a lawsuit in 1951 for the plagiarization , ahbez first proclaimed his innocence , and telephoned Yablokoff to explain 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 that the money was not important , but I wanted him to admit that the song was geganvet [stolen] ; and if he heard angels , they must have bought a copy of my song . " Eventually ahbez 's lawyers offered to have an out @-@ of @-@ court settlement , offering \$ 25 @,@ 000 (\$ 227 @,@ 917 in 2016 dollars) to Yablokoff , which he accepted . Friedwald remarked that " it struck no one as ironic that a song with message of love and peace should come to symbolize how cutthroat the pop music business was becoming " .

= = Other versions = =

The success of " Nature Boy " soon led to the release of a number of cover versions of the track . However , due to the AFM ban , other record companies could not release full versions with strings , only a capella tracks . Following Cole 's version of " Nature Boy " , the Dick Haymes recording was released by Decca Records as catalog number 24439 . The record first appeared on the Billboard charts on June 4 , 1948 , and peaked at number 11 .

Frank Sinatra also recorded a musicianless version , which was his only recording during the ban . Sinatra 's version of " Nature Boy " replaced the string sounds of the original recording with a choir conducted by Jeff Alexander , which , according to Friedwald , made the song sound like a Gregorian chant . The recording was released by Columbia Records as catalog number 38210 . It debuted on the Billboard charts on May 28 , 1948 , and peaked at number seven . Sinatra later performed the song on the radio show , Your Hit Parade , accompanied by a choir and orchestral arrangement . RCA Records planned to release versions by singers Perry Como and Bing Crosby , but they were subsequently cancelled due to the ban . Musicraft Records released Sarah Vaughan 's a cappella version on April 8 , 1948 . It was a commercial success , selling 20 @,@ 000 copies on the first day and peaking at number 11 on the Billboard chart .

A parody named " Serutan Yob " was recorded by The Unnatural Seven , an offshoot of Red Ingle and his Natural Seven that did not include Ingle due to the 1948 AFM recording ban . " Serutan Yob " featured vocals from Karen Tedder and Los Angeles DJ Jim Hawthorne . It was released by Capitol with catalog number 15210 , reached the Billboard charts on October 1 , 1948 , and stayed there for a total of four weeks , peaking at number 24 .

In 1955 , Miles Davis recorded the song with Charles Mingus as bassist . The recording for the song was filled with tension due to an ongoing conflict between Davis and Mingus , resulting in a charged version of the song . They were assisted by Teddy Charles on vibraphone and Elvin Jones on drums . Another version was recorded by singer Bobby Darin , released in 1961 . A psychedelic rock version was recorded in 1965 by 1960s San Francisco rock band The Great Society , with lead vocals from singer Grace Slick , released on their 1968 post @-@ breakup album How it Was . Same year , Marvin Gaye recorded and released his version on the Cole tribute album , A Tribute to the Great Nat " King " Cole .

Peggy Lee 's version of " Nature Boy " was recorded in 1948 , but released in 1995 as part of the compilation album , Why Don 't You Do Right ? Peggy Lee , 1947 ? 1948 . Abbey Lincoln recorded a version of the song for her 1995 album A Turtle 's Dream . Howard Reich from Chicago Tribune was impressed with the cover saying that " the mood of reverie and awe [that Lincoln] expresses in ' Nature Boy ' epitomize this album 's haunting appeal . "

Celine Dion performed the song as part of her A New Day ... concert at Caesars Palace . The song appeared on her 2002 studio album , A New Day Has Come , and on her 2004 live album , A New Day ... Live in Las Vegas . Stephen Thomas Erlewine from AllMusic said that the decision to include " Nature Boy " in A New Day Has Come was inspired by the song 's appearance in Baz Luhrmann 's musical , Moulin Rouge ! (2001) . With Billboard , Dion expressed her feelings while recording the track : " This is the one I had the most kick out of in the studio . I could hear the pedal of the piano and the touch of the keys while I was singing . We were following each other , this is the real thing . This was such my pleasure . " Initially strings and other instrumentation were added in post @-@ production , but were later removed to maintain the simplicity of Cole 's version .

Aaron Neville 's interpretation of the track was released in 2003 on his jazz standard album , titled Nature Boy : The Jazz Album . That year in December , Harry Connick , Jr. released a holiday themed rendition of " Nature Boy " , on his holiday album , Harry for the Holidays . At the tenth season of American Idol , contestant Casey Abrams presented a jazz version of the song , which was received with a standing ovation from the audience , but faced criticism from the media for the " strange " musical arrangements .

= = = Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga version = = =

After recording the jazz standard " The Lady Is a Tramp " , American singer Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga began working on a collaborative jazz album , titled Cheek to Cheek . The recording took place over a year in New York City , and featured jazz musicians associated with both artists . Bennett 's quartet was present , including Mike Renzi , Gray Sargent , Harold Jones and Marshall Wood as well as pianist Tom Lanier . Along with Evans , jazz trumpeter Brian Newman , a long @-@ time friend and colleague of Gaga , played on the album with his New York City based jazz quintet . Tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano and flautist Paul Horn were also enlisted as musicians . The songs were handpicked by Bennett and Gaga ; they selected tracks from the Great American Songbook including " Nature Boy " . It features instrumentation from flutes and drums , and has an orchestral arrangement . According to Kory Grow of Rolling Stone , Gaga sings in a Liza Minnelli inspired voice with a breathy range , followed by Bennett complimenting her with the story of meeting the titular character .

" Nature Boy " was released for streaming on Gaga 's Vevo channel from September 16 , 2014 . Preceding the release , Gaga tweeted about the background of the song , about the death of flautist Horn , as well as about ahbez , saying " This composer was part of a sub @-@ culture of nomadic hippies ! We channeled our own Gypsy lives in this performance " . Gil Kaufman from MTV News gave a positive review , saying that " This song sounds like what you imagine a smoky jazz club in

1940s New York would feel like . " Grow praised it as " sublime " , describing the track as a " loungier " version of Gaga and Bennett 's collaboration . Dave Lewis from HitFix believed that the " magic " of the song really happened once Bennett 's vocals were heard , following Gaga 's singing and the orchestration . Lewis said that " It 's not exactly ' Do What You Want With My Body ' , but Gaga and Bennett generate a different kind of heat . " Caroline Sullivan of The Guardian said that the song was " treated with the greatest delicacy " . He praised the flute sounds and the contrast between Gaga 's " vulnerable " vocals and Bennett 's " assured " one . Alexa Camp from Slant Magazine gave a negative review , saying that her timbre in " Nature Boy " appeared inconsistent , " shifting from soft and almost pleasant to parodic and comical , often within just a few short bars . " " Nature Boy " debuted on the Billboard Trending 140 Chart at number five and within a few hours , rose to number one . It also debuted at number 22 on the Billboard Jazz Digital Songs chart .

= = Usage in films = =

The song was a primary theme of the film score for *The Boy with Green Hair* (1948) , for which the original version was used . The producers of the film reportedly paid \$ 10 @, @ 000 to ahbez for using the song , which was cumulatively more than what the author of the story , Betsy Beaton , was paid . A recording by Kate Ceberano was featured in the film *The Crossing* (1990) . The tune and lyrics feature prominently in the film *Untamed Heart* (1993) , for which Cole 's version was used during the closing credits , while a piano version by Roger Williams served as the opener for the film . The song was also played in intermediate scenes featuring the principal cast .

Miles Davis ' recording of " Nature Boy " was used in the film *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999) . In the book *Music , Movies , Meanings , and Markets : Cinemajazzmatazz* , author Morris Holbrook described the song as a " nondiegetic performance " , exemplifying the plot development and sexual tension in the scene featuring Matt Damon and Jude Law play chess , naked and later in a bathtub scene . The song is performed at a jazz club in the film *Angel Eyes* , (2001) . A version recorded by Jon Hassell on trumpet and Ronu Majumdar on flute is featured on the soundtrack . The writing of " Nature Boy " was the theme of a 2000 Canadian TV film of the same title , directed by Kari Skogland . Callum Keith Rennie played ahbez , writing the song for Cole , played by Terence Carson , after falling in love with a woman named Anna Jacobs , portrayed by Tanya Allen .

The song was a central theme in *Luhrmann 's Moulin Rouge !* " Nature Boy " was initially arranged as a techno song with singer David Bowie 's vocals , before being sent to the group Massive Attack , whose remix was used in the film 's closing credits . Bowie described the rendition as " slinky and mysterious " , adding that Robert ' 3D ' Del Naja from the group had " put together a riveting piece of work , " and that Bowie was " totally pleased with the end result . " Both Bowie 's version and Massive Attack 's remix appeared on the soundtrack . The version used in *Moulin Rouge !* was sung by John Leguizamo , as Henri de Toulouse @-@ Lautrec , during the introductory scenes , as well as by Ewan McGregor 's character , Christian . Some of the film 's premise was based on the lyrics , in particular the opening lines . The closing lyric , " The greatest thing you 'll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return " is used throughout the film . While reviewing *Moulin Rouge !* , Erickson noted that " [by] itself , [' Nature Boy '] redeems the wonderful idea behind Luhrmann 's flawed but often wonderful movie . "

The song was performed by Rodrigo Santoro in the film *Helena* (2012) , during the radio interview when he asks if he could sing a song for his wife and son . Cole 's version was again played at the start of Mike Tyson 's one @-@ man show , *Mike Tyson : Undisputed Truth* , directed by Spike Lee that aired on HBO .