

Joseph A. Labuta and His Life in Music Education: An Oral History

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Oral history is a relatively new technique in historical research. Some of the first efforts in oral history (of former slaves and poor rural white populations in the southeastern United States) were sponsored by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s.¹ Allen Nevins started the oral history program at Columbia University in 1948,² and in 1966, the Oral History Association was formed.³

A primary purpose of oral history has been to document memories and reflections of past events as seen through the eyes of a particular person. Oral history differs from a traditional autobiography in that the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee serves to draw out memories and clarify issues provided by the interviewee.⁴ The result of this process is the creation of a primary source document that can be used by other historical researchers.

Several oral history projects have been conducted in music and in music education. Musical figures such as Aaron Copland, Charles Ives, and Charles Leonhard have been studied using these techniques.⁵ One of Charles Leonhard's former students was Joseph Anthony Labuta, who followed his mentor's example and also became a leader in the music education profession. He is the focus of this oral history project.

The purpose of this study was to create a preliminary biography on Dr. Joseph A. Labuta, one of the major figures in American music education during the second half of the twentieth century. Labuta's recalled memories were used to explore selected aspects of music education history during that period.

1. Louis Star, "Oral History," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. David D. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (London: Altamira Press, 1996), 43.

2. *Ibid.*, 44.

3. *Ibid.*, 48.

4. Barbara Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan, *The Oral History Manual* (New York: Altamira Press, 2002), 1.

5. Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland 1900 Through 1942* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984); Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland Since 1943* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); Vivian Perlis & Libby Van Cleve, *Composers' Voices from Ives to Ellington: An Oral History of American Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Barbara L. Bennett, "The Charles Leonhard Oral History Memoirs," *Southeastern Journal of Music Education* 4 (1992): 84–100.

Labuta, professor emeritus of music education at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, has written four well-known music education textbooks that are still currently in use, as well as influential articles and monographs.⁶ He has been a leader in the field of music education in the United States, holding a number of offices at the state and national levels of MENC: The National Association for Music Education.⁷ Over the course of his career, Labuta has left a legacy of more than 900 music education and conducting students who have benefited through his teaching.⁸

Method

Labuta was contacted by the study author and agreed to participate in the project. Dates for the face-to-face interviews were set, and Labuta provided the researcher with preliminary written material to assist in the preparation of the interviews.

Oral history “life interview” techniques were used to create the materials for this project.⁹ A series of autobiographical interviews were conducted with Labuta, focusing on a variety of topics related to his career. Bennett’s 1992 oral history project on Charles Leonhard served as a model for the selection of interview topics.¹⁰ The list of topics below was agreed upon by the researcher and Labuta.

1. General Life Overview
2. Public School Teaching
3. University of Illinois
4. Central Methodist College/Shepherd College
5. Leonhard and University of Illinois
6. Early Articles
7. Wayne State University, 1967–1977
8. Wayne State, 1977–1987
9. Wayne State, 1987–present (retirement)

6. Joseph A. Labuta, *Teaching Musicianship in the High School Band* (Ft. Lauderdale: Meredith Music, 2000); *A Guide to Accountability in Music Instruction* (New York: Parker Pub., 1974); *Basic Conducting Techniques*, 5th edition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003); and Joseph A. Labuta and Deborah Smith, *Music Education: Historical Contexts and Perspectives* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996).

7. MENC: The National Association for Music Education was originally known as the Music Supervisors National Conference.

8. Based on grade books in the possession of Joseph Labuta.

9. Sommer and Quinlan, 3.

10. Barbara L. Bennett, “The Charles Leonhard Connection,” *Council for Research in Music Education Bulletin* 110 (1991): 3–20; and “Leonhard Oral History Memoirs.”

10. Courses
11. Books: *Teaching Musicianship in the High School Band*
12. Books: *Basic Conducting Techniques*
13. Books: *A Guide to Accountability in Music Instruction*
14. Books: *Music Education: Historical Contexts and Perspectives*
15. Articles
16. *Journal of Research in Music Education* (JRME) Editorial Committee
17. Professional Activities (officer, clinician, conductor)
18. Student Accomplishments

An open-ended format was used, based on the outline prepared for each interview session.¹¹ Neutral, open-ended questions were used to elicit responses from Labuta and were organized either by chronology or by general topic area. When needed, follow-up questions were used to shed light on information provided. Each interview lasted between one and two hours, as suggested by Sommer and Quinland.¹²

The interviews were audio tape-recorded and transcribed. After each interview was transcribed, Labuta received the transcription for review; he corrected and clarified remarks in several instances.

Three sets of interviews were conducted. The first took place at the author's university office in Coral Gables, Florida, in February 2004. Topics included a life overview, Labuta's public school teaching, years at the University of Illinois, relationship with Charles Leonhard, and early college teaching and professional activity. (The first set of interviews also was digitally video-recorded, but the tapes were not used in the present study.) The second round of interviews were conducted at Labuta's residence in Saline, Michigan, in May 2004, and the final sessions were conducted (also at the Labuta residence) in May 2005. The second and third sets of interviews focused on Labuta's years as a professor of music education at Wayne State University in Detroit, professional contributions while at Wayne State, his books, as well as his relationship to major figures in music education. The interviews were used to create a preliminary biography of Labuta's professional life. This article was developed from material gathered from the first round of interviews.

Early Musical Experiences

Joseph A. Labuta was born on October 7, 1931, to Czech immigrant parents in the St. Louis, Missouri, area. His mother, who was musically inclined, nurtured Labuta's musical talent. He says the following about his early family life:

11. Sommer and Quinland, 58–59.

12. *Ibid.*, 68.

My mother, although not trained, was very, very musical. She taught me songs; she would harmonize as I sang. I did quite a bit of singing as a child. I know my brother [studied] a trumpet [for a while] and let it go. I got hold of my brother's old beat-up trumpet. [It] was my first instrument.¹³



Labuta at age five; photograph provided by Joseph A. Labuta.

It was obvious that Labuta had musical talent. He recalls having a fine elementary music teacher who encouraged him to sing and gave him soprano solos throughout his elementary school years. He recounts his first instrumental musical experiences in fourth grade:

I remember learning the C scale rather quickly. [Prior to starting the trumpet,] my friend and I were into these rather informal instruments like the tonettes [and] the ocarina. I was playing these, playing tunes by ear. When I picked up the trumpet, playing things by ear just came rather naturally. Initially I depended on learning this way rather than reading music.¹⁴

Labuta's musical success continued in both junior and senior high school. Students in his middle school were allowed to audition for high school ensembles, and he was placed in high school ensembles in seventh grade. He remembers, "By seventh grade I was playing down the line in the high school

13. Joseph Labuta, interview by author, 19 February 2004, Coral Gables, FL, tape recording; transcripts in possession of the author.

14. *Ibid.*

band. I ended up in the eighth grade playing first trumpet in the orchestra and having the solo cornet chair in the band.”¹⁵



Labuta in ninth grade; provided by Joseph A. Labuta.

By the time Labuta was a freshman in high school, he was playing professionally in a dance band. All the other band members were adults.

[I] played at a road house two nights a week and got fourteen dollars a week. It was great. The dance work I enjoyed very much, and I was listening to Dizzy Gillespie [and] Charlie Parker at that time. It was so interesting. I was wearing out the bands [listening to the records] where the trumpets were playing and especially the Dizzy Gillespie sides. I was into bop and was known as “Joe La BeBop.”¹⁶

Another significant musical experience for Labuta during his high school years was a trumpet puppet vaudeville act that he put together. He recounts the following story about his act:

When I was a young kid, I saw a movie short. [This short had] a trumpet player who had this little puppet playing the trumpet. At some point in my life I picked up a little puppet that was a monkey. I started fooling around with it when I started playing trumpet and my mother used

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

to just literally fall on the floor. It was the funniest thing she ever saw. I managed to put together a little act with the trumpet playing monkey. [In high school] I showed it to this guy who used to play vaudeville. He smiled and nodded, and he said “Yeah, there was a guy on the vaudeville circuit who had one of those acts.” He told me all the stuff that this guy did. I incorporated that into my act and it became quite a thing. In college my dad built a stand that held the trumpet. I did a two puppet act, one puppet conducted, one played the trumpet. I actually did a version of the *William Tell Overture* where the one puppet actually conducted the college band. I always liked showbiz.¹⁷



Labuta's puppet act, Central College, circa 1950; provided by Joseph A. Labuta.

Undergraduate Education

After graduating from high school, Labuta attended Central College (now Central Methodist College) as a music education major and graduated in 1953. He describes the school as:

... more or less [a] Missouri version of an Oberlin [Conservatory]. I don't recall the exact number, but I would assume there were around 100 majors. Many, many band directors in the state of Missouri are graduates of Central College; very successful band directors I might add.¹⁸

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

One of the significant influences on Labuta's career came from the band directors at the college, who indirectly influenced his later interest in teaching musicianship in a band setting. As he explains:

The band director my first three years was a VanderCook man all the way.¹⁹ He was able to put together good bands—kind of tyrannical and hardnosed and all the things you think about a band director. But he got results and gave you a way to be successful. By the time I was a senior, a new band director came. . . . [He] was an interesting contrast. Where the initial band director was a nit-picker [with] every little piece in place, the other was just the opposite; the longer line maybe not as clean but much more expressive, much more musical.²⁰

Army and Public School Teaching

After college Labuta was hired to teach music in Huntsville, Missouri. Within a month of being hired, he was drafted. He received an induction postponement but left Huntsville to join the army in January 1954, after having taught for one semester. He remembers the experience:

I got into basic training and they had a band training unit there on base. This was in Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, Fort Smith. I audition[ed], and was told we can use you here. I ended up fighting the Korean War in Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, in the band. We played some very, very fine music. I spent time in the band library going through scores and making a repertory list for myself. [We] had a good-sized group and a well balanced group and some very fine musicians. A number of them were graduates of the University of Illinois, and they talked up the University of Illinois. When it was time for me to think about where I would like to go to continue my graduate school, [the] University of Illinois was right at the top. They had nothing but good things to say about it.²¹

After serving in the army, Labuta obtained a teaching position in 1956 at Willow Springs High School in Willow Springs, Missouri, a small town in the Ozark mountain region. The school had a very strong music program: three bands, a required freshman choir and a senior high choir that included many members of the football team. Labuta taught both the choir and band programs at Willow Springs. The bands were extremely successful, receiving multiple first division ratings at contests, as did the choirs. In addition, he initiated a strings program,

19. VanderCook College of Music in Chicago, Illinois, specializes in practical training of music teachers.

20. Labuta interview, 19 February 2004.

21. *Ibid.*

and taught secondary general music and music theory. He recalls, "I decided in the third year that I wanted to try to teach everything in the public schools. I thought probably I'd get a music education job [or] be a supervisor of music."²²

It was at Willow Springs that Labuta first began to think about systematically teaching expression to his band. He recalls making the shift from a technical orientation to an expressive orientation:

Willow Springs was the first time that I was thinking in terms of expression; of the intensity [and] release motion notions that I had. We all intuitively do many things expressively as musicians, but this was a kind of an awakening. I was very taken with how this [could] be done. I [began] developing a real method to do this, a procedure, a strategy to start. Somehow this is something that can be taught.²³

In 1959 Labuta took a position in a suburb of Kansas City, Missouri, at Lexington High School. There he taught band and orchestra; the band was larger and the position more prestigious. It was at Lexington that Labuta started to develop the materials that he eventually incorporated into his first book, *Teaching Musicianship in the High School Band*.²⁴ As he remembers:

I started working on musicianship in [a] rehearsal format. We actually did many of the things in that band that ended up in the musicianship book. I developed the materials, I passed out materials, I gave them some examinations, and we worked on aspects of phrasing and line. The material I developed for that band ended up being incorporated into the musicianship book.²⁵

Graduate Education

When Labuta was discharged from the army in January of 1956, he decided to attend the University of Missouri and work on a master's degree. After one semester and two summers of coursework, he was awarded his degree.

While still at Willow Springs, Labuta had applied and interviewed for a more prestigious high school position in North Kansas City. Another person was hired for the position; the assistant principal at the school explained that the successful candidate obtained a masters degree from the University of Michigan, and the fact that he was a graduate of a Big Ten university was a deciding factor. This infuriated Labuta.

22. Labuta interview, 20 February 2004.

23. Labuta interview, 21 February 2004.

24. Labuta, *Teaching Musicianship*.

25. Labuta interview, 20 February 2004.

As a result of this experience, Labuta decided that he wanted to attend a Big Ten university for additional coursework to make himself more competitive as a high school band director. Several factors influenced his decision:

A number of my colleagues there in the service band were University of Illinois graduates. They spoke very, very favorably, in glowing terms about the University of Illinois. So the obvious choice of a school which also was not as far away as Michigan was the University of Illinois. I talked to my advisor at the University of Missouri, Paul Matthews, who happened to know and was a former colleague at Teacher's College in New York, Columbia University, of Charlie Leonhard. Charles Leonhard [was] the head of the new doctoral program at the University of Illinois. [My advisor Paul Matthews provided me with a] letter of introduction and there I went. As it turned out, I was accepted in the program and took my entrance exam with Marilyn Pflederer Zimmerman, as a matter of fact, along with about a dozen others. She and I were the two who made it into the program of those who took the test that summer.²⁶

Labuta entered the doctoral program at the University of Illinois in 1958 and was awarded the Ed.D. degree in 1965. Many of his colleagues during his doctoral work later became well-known figures in music education:

There were just a number of very brilliant people there. In the time I was at Illinois, Richard Colwell and his future wife Ruth Crockett, who was a very brilliant lady, were there. Marilyn Pflederer was there. Bennett Reimer was [also] in the program.²⁷

Another Illinois colleague, a master of music student named Charles Winking, befriended Labuta. Later they collaborated in the early development of the musicianship book. Labuta completed three summers of coursework while teaching at Lexington High School and then was in residence at the university where he developed his dissertation.

Labuta was taught by a number of prominent professors at Illinois who influenced his later professional work. He studied conducting with Bjornar Bergathon, research methods with Robert Petzold, aesthetics with Harry Broudy, and philosophy with Foster MacMurray. His dissertation advisor and greatest mentor was Charles Leonhard.²⁸

26. Labuta interview, 20 February 2004.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

Labuta's dissertation work took him from musical expressiveness to conducting, and helped to pave the way for his later books on both topics.²⁹ He recalls his dissertation development:

My idea was to do a dissertation in the realm of musical expressiveness. That was my original idea and I kept bringing proposals in to Leonhard. [He] would read them and say, "Think about it some more, rework it, and bring it back." Finally one day, I came in with my latest proposal. He read through it and said, "Well, now Joe, I think what you really mean is, what you really want to do..." and he picked up on the conducting aspect. He laid it out, one of his "pat" formula dissertations based on the Leonhard-House book. I would do a study, a theoretical basis for college instrumental conducting. His idea was that it would contain historical aspects, aesthetics, and the psychology of leadership that would be applied to a conducting curriculum. As it turned out, one chapter would be on musical expression. I worked very diligently on it and I looked at some of the other dissertations that were done using this design. Ruth Colwell did her dissertation on music appreciation, which was [an] extremely well written dissertation. I used it as a standard for my own.³⁰

Early Collegiate Teaching

Labuta's first college position was at Shepherd College (1962–1966)³¹ in West Virginia. He recalls how he obtained this position:

I applied at a number of colleges for my first teaching job, and [there were] actually two jobs I think I could have had. One was at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada, the other at University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. I did not wish to go to Canada, and the other job [did not include] conducting. Since my dissertation was on the topic of college and university level conducting, I felt I needed a job where I would be teaching [conducting] at the college level. After these jobs came by there was a long dry spell and I was getting very nervous. Bennett Reimer, who was working in the placement office at the time, told me not to worry, you'll get your job. [A] job opened up in the very eastern tip of West Virginia at Shepherd College, about ninety miles up from Washington D.C. When I interviewed for the job I found out that it entailed teaching almost everything in instrumental music. I don't know whether I was the only one qualified enough, or the only one gullible enough, or maybe stupid enough to accept the job.³²

29. Labuta, *Teaching Musicianship and Basic Conducting Techniques*.

30. Labuta interview, 20 February 2004.

31. Joseph A. Labuta, *vita*.

32. *Ibid.*

Labuta taught many courses during his four years at Shepherd, including all applied music, all instrument classes, music appreciation, elementary music methods, music fundamentals for elementary teachers, secondary music methods, instrumental repair, band arranging, form and analysis, band, the college-community orchestra, and conducting, as well as supervising student teaching. He was very successful while at Shepherd, but the heavy teaching load delayed the completion of his dissertation until 1965.

His department chair referred to him as a “B.Y.P.” (“brash young punk”) for his efforts to improve the number of student band members and the quality of the band. Labuta had the following things to say about his bands during this period:

The band was an interesting situation. I had about forty students, and we marched. Being inventive, in my second year I put together this group called the Ram’s Horns. It attracted a number of students who otherwise wouldn’t be in band. We had close to 100 students the second year. By the third year I was established enough to have the concert band set up on the tarmac instead of marching on the field. I did the things to create a balanced group. We ended up with a very large group.³³

In addition to band directing, Labuta used his years at Shepherd to develop ideas regarding conducting that were later incorporated into his conducting text:

I based the class on the research I had done at Illinois, and the conducting I had taught to my high school students. The technique was well analyzed and presented sequentially. I used the band as a laboratory group. [What] I learned from this was that you needed a [group] to conduct. In my subsequent conducting book, I tackled that by making sure there were appropriate excerpts [that could be played by a group]. [I focused on] leading a group, as well as teaching expressiveness. I was very aware of tension-release motion and how you bring this out. I used the material I had developed in Lexington [on teaching expression].³⁴

In 1966, after four years teaching at Shepherd College, Labuta was offered his “dream job” as director of bands at Central Methodist College in Missouri, the same college where he had received his undergraduate degree thirteen years earlier. However, he stayed in that position for only one year. Labuta recalls that year:

33. Labuta interview, 21 February 2004.

34. *Ibid.*

When I got the call from the dean of the conservatory that they wanted me to come and be the band director, I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. I lasted one year. This was a difficult situation. I was not given the support that the previous director was given. I walked in [and found] that I had the budget for the year of -\$1,600, and I was [asked] somehow to pay back money that had been "borrowed" from a college student loan fund. So I fought this all year.

The band was good and we have a [recording] that is high quality. One of the students at Central was David Holsinger. We performed his first band composition [while on tour]. The teaching there was tough. I counted up about thirty-six contact hours before I gave up and decided I didn't want to know exactly how many contact hours. I ended up with an ulcer. I had started applying in the spring and I applied to many, many places, but ended up at Wayne State University.³⁵

At Central Methodist Labuta realized that being a college band director was not really his dream job. His interests were shifting from band directing to teaching music education, and his new position would provide this opportunity.

Wayne State University

Labuta was hired as an assistant professor by Wayne State University in Detroit in 1967.³⁶ He was delighted with his new position. He details his first year:

The Wayne State job entailed teaching conducting class, which I wanted to do. It entailed teaching elementary music for classroom teachers. There were many student teachers. In those days there were up to thirty student teachers a term, and [I ended up with] a dozen or so. Still, in going to Wayne State from coming out of Central was like going on vacation. My first year there the department chair was very good because he did not assign a heavy course load. He assigned me also to one of the instrumental music education people for mentoring. I had a very pleasant experience my first year there.³⁷

At the time of his hiring, the band director position just had been vacated (Harry Begian had left Wayne State to become director of bands at Michigan

35. Labuta interview, 20 February 2004.

36. Robert Lawson and Michael Zelenak, *History of the Music Program at Wayne State University* (Detroit, MI: College of Fine, Performing, and Communication Arts, Wayne State University, 1996), 24.

37. Labuta interview, 20 February 1984.

State University), and a half-time interim band director (Harold Arnoldi) was hired. However, he did not remain in the position and Labuta then became interim band director during 1968–69 school year. The department then decided that a full-time director was needed and Labuta returned to teaching music education.³⁸ He reveals the following about his band directing experience that year:

I left for my summer vacation, thinking [that] everything was settled that Arnoldi obviously would go to Wayne [and leave his position at Cass Technical High School in Detroit]. I had been asked if there was a problem would I take the band job as an interim band director, and I agreed to do that. I got back from my vacation; found out that I was the band director. I enjoyed it very much because I had a group for the first time that was good enough to play the literature I wanted to do. I did the Schoenberg *Variations*, the *Hindemith Symphony*, [and] the *Persichetti Symphony*. So it was a good experience, but I was ready to let it go.³⁹

After returning to full-time music education duties, Labuta became very active professionally and was soon nationally known through his books and other professional activities. In 1970, he served as a consultant with the Michigan Department of Education. He also published his musicianship manual (first developed at Lexington High School) that year in the *National Association of College Wind and Percussion Instructors (NACWAPI) journal*.⁴⁰ The following year he was appointed to the executive board of the Michigan Music Educators Association, and also served as their research chair and a member of the conference planning committee. It was around this time that Labuta was also involved in the MENC's goals and objectives project.⁴¹

In 1972 Labuta was selected to serve on the editorial board of the *Journal of Research in Music Education*. He discusses how he became a member of the editorial board:

Robert Petzold came to the University of Illinois one summer. He taught a research class there that the graduates all gravitated to. It was during this period that I found a dissertation that was plagiarized. I pointed this out to Petzold. We went over to the library. He and I and another grad student

38. Lawson and Zelenak, *History*, 25.

39. Labuta interview, 19 February 2004.

40. Joseph A. Labuta, "Interpretation and Expressiveness, A Guide to Musicianship for Performer and Conductor," *NACWAPI Bulletin* XVII, no. 2 (Winter 1969–70): 25–28 and 37–43; and no. 3 (Spring 1970): 35–46.

41. Labuta vita.

read through this comparing, side by side, and it was obvious that this was a plagiarism. Robert Petzold remembered this [as editor of the *Journal of Research in Music Education*]. When there was an opening on the editorial committee for the journal, [he] asked if I would be interested in applying for it which I did. I [got] the position on the editorial board, which again was terrific.⁴²

The first of Labuta's influential books, *Teaching Musicianship in the High School Band*, was published in 1972. The book grew out of his work at Lexington High School, his doctoral studies at Illinois with Charles Leonhard, and the many conversations about teaching musicianship he had with his classmate Charlie Winking. He recalls his and Winking's early collaboration on the book:

About the time that I had the band job or shortly thereafter, [my classmate] Charlie Winking sent me a copy of [a] letter [he had sent] to the music education editor at Parker Books accepting the offer to write a book on musicianship in band, providing that I would come in as co-author with him. I agreed, so Charlie Winking and I went to work on this book. We became very good friends. [But] we almost lost our friendship over this book. We work[ed] on and submit[ed] the proposal. The proposal had to be revised and he decided, well, he didn't have time for this, why don't I just do it. So [I said], "Oh, come on Charlie, we can do this." Finally we submitted a sample chapter, and this sample chapter was sent back with ideas about what this book should be. Charlie said, "Well, that's it. I'm out of here." So I said, "Do you care if I revise the chapter?" which essentially he wrote. I rewrote it and submitted it and it was accepted, so then I went solo on the musicianship book.⁴³

In the book Labuta provides a vision for creating a comprehensive musicianship-based band curriculum. He begins by presenting material on selecting music for teaching musicianship. The subsequent chapters cover techniques for teaching various musical elements, including timbre, rhythm, melody, harmony, texture and form. In these chapters he includes specific repertoire examples for teaching the variety of musical content objectives outlined. Additional chapters focus on teaching of structure and form, teaching musical style, and historical performance practice, as well as the evaluation of musicianship.⁴⁴

42. Ibid.

43. Labuta interview, 20 February 2004.

44. Labuta, *Teaching Musicianship*.

One of Labuta's colleagues at the time, Roy Ernst (later of the Eastman School of Music), said the following about his musicianship book:

I first met Joe when I was a high school teacher in Livonia sometime in the early 1970s. I was interested in comprehensive musicianship and I found Joe's book on *Teaching Musicianship in the High School Band* to be the best resource. Joe visited me in Livonia and that started a long professional and personal friendship.⁴⁵

Another colleague, band composer Bruce Pearson, also praises the book, saying:

Teaching Musicianship in the High School Band was literally the writing that changed my career. Prior to reading it, I didn't know anything about comprehensive musicianship.⁴⁶

Labuta's students also were influenced by his work with teaching musicianship. Grant Hoemke, one of his first students at Wayne State, stated:

He taught me that there are many great pieces of music worthy [of] performance and study which do not make great technical demands on the players, but still are capable of stretching their musical horizons. Perhaps the most important lesson learned was the importance of using performance as a means to teaching music and musicianship. Because of that, I have always thought of myself as a music educator first and a band or orchestra director second. To that end, the music program of the Farmington, Michigan Public Schools (which I was very instrumental in developing) is annually rated among the "top comprehensive music programs" in the country.⁴⁷

During this period, Labuta also made professional presentations throughout the country. In 1973 he was the featured speaker at the Southern Division MENC conference, where he spoke on accountability in music instruction; he also delivered a session on accountability at the Louisiana Music Educators conference. In 1974 he presented at the National Commission on Instruction and at the MENC national conference in Anaheim.

In 1974, at the height of the accountability movement, Labuta published his second book, *A Guide to Accountability in Music Instruction*. This book was based on his 1972 *Music Educators Journal* article entitled "Accent on the

45. Roy Ernst, e-mail correspondence with author, 27 November 2006. It should be noted that Roy Ernst was a Wayne State graduate and a former music teacher in Livonia, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit.

46. Bruce Pearson, www.meredithmusic.com; Internet, accessed 1 December 2006.

47. Grant Hoemke, e-mail correspondence with author, 24 November 2006.

Output: Accountability in Music Education.”⁴⁸ He shared the following account regarding the creation of this book:

That book came from the work that MMEA (Michigan Music Educators [Association]), and Bob Sidnell and I and the committees did for the State Department. That book really came out of the work that was done in the accountability movement. Some of it was a bit of a stretch I think in retrospect.⁴⁹

The content contained in this text focused on applying the systems approach to music education. Labuta examines components of the systems approach, including writing objectives, creating assessments, and choosing instructional strategies.⁵⁰

When Wilber Peterson, the director of music education at Wayne State, had a heart attack in 1975, Labuta was appointed his replacement.⁵¹ (Peterson retired in 1977 and Labuta was then named associate chair and liaison with the College of Education.⁵²) In 1976 he presented sessions on musicianship at the MENC national conference in Atlantic City, the Catholic Bandmasters Association Conference, the Maryland Music Educators Conference, and the University of Wisconsin Extension, as well as a session of accountability in music instruction at the Maryland conference.⁵³ He also authored a *Music Educator's Journal* article, based on his musicianship book, titled “The Band as a Learning Laboratory.”⁵⁴

In 1977 Labuta made ten presentations and guest conducted an honors band in Maryland. He presented five sessions on “Aesthetic Education through Performance,”⁵⁵ three sessions on “Accountability,”⁵⁶ and sessions on “Action

48. Joseph A. Labuta, “Accent on the Output: Accountability in Music Education,” *Music Educators Journal* 59, no.1 (1972): 43.

49. Labuta interview, 20 February 2004.

50. Labuta, *Guide to Accountability*.

51. Lawson and Zelenak, *History*, 37.

52. *Ibid.*, 40.

53. Labuta interview, 20 May 2004.

54. Joseph A. Labuta, “The Band as a Learning Laboratory,” *Music Educator's Journal* 62, no. 5 (1976): 48–52.

55. Labuta interview, 20 May 2004. Presented at the Eastern and Western Division Conferences of MENC, at Case Western Reserve University, the University of Delaware, and at the Crane School of Music.

56. *Ibid.* Presented at the Michigan Conference in Ann Arbor, the New Jersey Music Educators conference, and at the University of Delaware

Research” (in Ann Arbor) and “Budget Problems in School Music” (at the combined Northwest/Southwest Division MENC conference in Kansas City). That year his department chair referred to Labuta as “Wandering Joe.” In 1978 and 1979 Labuta presented three sessions on “Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance.”⁵⁷ He presented accountability sessions in 1979 and 1980 at the Louisiana music educators’ state conference and the MENC national conference in Miami Beach, and a session on musicianship at the Ann Arbor Conference in 1982.⁵⁸

After twenty years of teaching college conducting classes, the first edition of Labuta’s *Basic Conducting Techniques* was published in 1982. He explains how he developed the ideas for that text:

There is always the problem of what literature you’re going to use in a conducting class. What appropriate literature that’s useable by whatever personnel, whatever instrumentation you end up with in the conducting class. I stumbled across at one point a book by Jerry Long who used trio format, and he composed most of the little exercises in his book. These were geared to teaching whatever the specific technique was. I felt that if I could get better examples then I could probably put together a better book. I started thinking about that and at the time the competency-based movement came on the scene. Having done quite a bit of work with objectives and so forth, this seemed to be a natural way to put things together in modules. I started looking around and found that there was a self-teaching laboratory for nurses using modules. I purchased some of those and used their format, their design, for the modules that I used. [I] tried it out in my class. I [also] had the orchestra director and conducting teacher at Oakland University and several others try out the manuscript.⁵⁹

Michael Krajewski, one of Labuta’s students from the early 1970s who is now pops conductor of the Houston Symphony Orchestra, describes using material that Labuta would later incorporate in his conducting text:

I was in Joe Labuta’s undergraduate conducting class in the early 1970s. At that time he was working on his book, *Basic Conducting Techniques*, using prototypes of parts of the book in class. The book turned out to be an excellent tool for understanding the fundamentals of conducting. In his class we learned how to clearly and efficiently deal with essential techniques of conducting. In the work that I now do with professional orchestras,

57. Ibid. Presented at the Louisiana Music Educators conference, Georgia State, and at Central Methodist College.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

rehearsal time is always of the essence. It is imperative to be able to communicate my intentions to an orchestra as much as possible with gestures, without having to make lengthy explanations. The basic techniques I picked up in Joe's class turned out to be an excellent foundation for my subsequent career in conducting.⁶⁰

After the publication of his conducting textbook, most of Labuta's professional presentations were related to conducting. In 1981 he offered a workshop on conducting techniques for music teachers in the Detroit public schools. In 1983 he presented workshops on conducting at Oklahoma City, the National Catholic Bandmasters conference, and the University of Western Kentucky; in 1987 at the Eastman School of Music and Northwestern University; in 1989 at Moorhead State, the State University of New York at Buffalo, and the University of Illinois.⁶¹

In 1987 Labuta stepped down as associate chair, but continued as director of music education and teaching instrumental music education courses at Wayne State.⁶² He said the following about this experience:

The instrumental music education person [who] was doing the method classes and other coursework in music education did not get tenure. It was at a time when there was a freeze on hiring, and no one was hired in his place. It was up to me then to do all the coursework in music education. I applied for a one-semester sabbatical to travel and interview, and review and collect syllabi of methods courses. I traveled to Northwestern where I gave a guest lecture on conducting, to the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and also the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Then, going [in the] other direction, I went to the University of Buffalo, Fredonia, Ithaca, and Eastman, collecting syllabi and observing. At Eastman I was fortunate to renew a good acquaintanceship with Roy Ernst.

Teaching the methods class was very enjoyable. I instituted a program where it was very much field-based. We spent time out in one school in particular that was an inner city school. The program was run by one of our graduates and extremely well run. It was just a good opportunity, a good situation to bring the methods students for the elementary experience. And then for the secondary experience they would go in addition to any practicum they were assigned to observe and participate in various secondary schools.⁶³

60. Michael Krajewski, e-mail correspondence with the author, 7 November 2006.

61. Labuta interview, 20 May 2004.

62. *Ibid.*

63. Labuta interview, 20 February 2004.

In 1990, having developed a videotape to accompany the second edition of his conducting text,⁶⁴ Labuta presented sessions on using videotape in conducting pedagogy at the College Music Society in Milwaukee, the University of Minnesota-Duluth, and at Shepherd College. He followed these workshops with an additional videotape and conducting workshop at the 1991 Ann Arbor Conference.

Throughout Labuta's teaching career, he had a positive influence on many students. As Grant Hoemke, one of Labuta's first students at Wayne State, stated:

Joe showed confidence in my musicianship and especially my ability to hear critically. [He] believed in me and gave me many opportunities to demonstrate my musical abilities and develop confidence in myself. Without his support and guidance, I would not have enjoyed a very successful 35-year public school teaching career. Without Joe's gentle but persistent prodding and assistance, I and a lot of others, might still not have our master[s] degrees. That's what made him such a great advisor and friend to so many students through the years. He really took a personal interest in all of his students.⁶⁵

Hoemke's assessment is also reflected in the reminiscences of one of Labuta's last students at Wayne State, Charles Ciorba of Millikin University, who shared the following account:

Upon graduating from high school, I went straight to college in order to study music education. It was there where I first met Dr. Labuta. His approach was firm but fair and I developed an immediate respect for him. Unfortunately, my maturity level at the time was not conducive to the academic rigors of college and I eventually dropped out.

Ten years later, I made a conscious decision to return to college. Upon entering the music building at Wayne State University for the first time in a decade, [the first person] I saw was Dr. Labuta walking in the hallway. He immediately recognized me and with a firm handshake, welcomed me back into the program. No lectures, no cynical remarks; just a sincere offer to study music education. Within weeks, Dr. Labuta planned out my academic curriculum for the next few years. I quickly became a model student and graduated with honors.

Professionally, I went on to become a successful educator, scholar, researcher, and eventually, a college professor. I am proud to say that Joe Labuta has made a significant influence in my professional life.⁶⁶

64. WDET-FM102 Program Guide, Detroit, Michigan, June 1989.

65. Grant Hoemke, e-mail correspondence with the author, 24 November 2006.

66. Charles Ciorba, e-mail correspondence with the author, 19 November 2006.

Labuta was elected president of the Michigan Music Educators Association (MMEA) in 1992, serving a two-year term. In this capacity he wrote a series of position papers for the association justifying the existence of music education. From 1992 to 1994, he served as a member of the MENC National Assembly, and was a reviewer for both the 1992 *Handbook of Research in Music Teaching and Learning*, and for the *Opportunity to Learn Standards* portion of the MENC National Voluntary Standards in Music Education. It was also during this time that he collaborated with his Wayne State colleague Deborah Smith on his last book, *Music Education: Historical Contexts and Perspectives*, published in 1996.⁶⁷

Retirement

Labuta retired from full-time teaching in 1996, but continued to teach conducting until 2002. He taught music for a total of forty-five years, including thirty-four years at Wayne State University. Since he retired, Labuta has moved to Saline, Michigan. He continues to play trumpet in several orchestras and big bands. He also founded the Saline New Horizons Band and serves as its conductor. Reflecting back on his career, Labuta states:

I have been so very fortunate in my life for the opportunities, education, and especially the experiences with quality teachers that prepared me for my career in writing and teaching. I did not move on to be some fabulous researcher; it appears I was not destined to be that. I never dreamed that I would someday be a university professor who is published and can leave some kind of legacy... the legacy that we can leave on our students hopefully for the better. I've heard from some of them that they were touched in some way. That was the most gratifying part.⁶⁸



Labuta in 2005; provided by Joseph A. Labuta.

67. Labuta interview, 20 February 2004.

68. Ibid.

Labuta's longtime colleague, Bennett Reimer, had the following to say about his legacy:

Joe Labuta and I crossed paths as students in the doctoral program in music education at the University of Illinois, back during the Stone Age. He impressed me with his intelligence and his wit. Also his ambition. He clearly intended to make his mark on the profession and he clearly has done so, to the benefit of all of us.

His books are models of thoughtfulness and modesty. I was impressed with their quality when I first read them, and later when I revisited them. They display straightforward good sense, clear language, and depth of understanding below the surface. This exemplifies Joe as a person as well. He remains in my memory as a clearheaded, unpretentious, humorous man, easily knowable and likable. Yet the waters underneath the attractive surface run deep. We are fortunate that he has made his excellent contributions, and I feel fortunate that he was part of my personal history. Long may his history continue.⁶⁹

Conclusion

From humble beginnings, Joseph A. Labuta was encouraged by his immigrant parents to study music, and he excelled. Later, as a young band director, he became interested in teaching musicianship to his students, and spent his professional life presenting and writing articles and books that put comprehensive musicianship into concrete terms. His book on accountability was a benchmark of its era. His dissertation work with Charles Leonhard and years of college conducting teaching led to the creation of his conducting text, which is now in its fifth edition and still widely used. Labuta's contributions to music education have extended well beyond his teaching at Wayne State University, and his influence upon the profession has been both significant and enduring.

69. Bennett Reimer, e-mail correspondence with author, 20 November 2006.