

Avshalomov—Lifeboat Variations  
Narration and Stage Business

NOTES: Optional cuts in the musical score, if used by the conductor, mean you must omit the corresponding bits of narration.

Allow for spontaneous applause, especially with variations with big endings, but never milk it. Simply acknowledge it with a nod or a smile. No solo bows for anyone. Then MOVE ON.

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**OPTIONAL SINGALONG INTRODUCTION**

Narrator (or conductor) get your pitch C backstage. Walk onstage, bow simply, wait for near-silence, then sing, medium loud, *no microphone*, in the key of C:

**“Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream.  
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream.”**

While finishing the last phrase, gesture to the audience to sing along the second time. (The band may sing too, but do not cue them.) Cut the audience off after the end of “dream”, smile encouragement.

Then gesture to divide the audience into 4 groups/parts. Cue each group to start, singing along with them for one phrase each. After starting the fourth group, show each group in turn to repeat, by a circular gesture. After 2 times through, cut each group off in turn at the end of “dream”. Let group 4 finish alone with no cutoff. Allow for brief laughter, possible applause. In silence, the conductor cues the start of the Lifeboat Variations immediately. (Narrator sits.)

## NARRATION

**“This is a concert band [alt: symphonic *wind* ensemble\*]. There are three groups of players: The Woodwind and the Brass *blow wind* through their instruments. The Percussion *hit* their instruments.”**

[\*Conductor's choice]

**"Now a fresh variation for each kind of instrument. First the Woodwinds. Flute players blow across a hole in the side, like tooting on a soda bottle. Here are the pure, nimble Flutes, and the tiny, sparkling Piccolo."**

**"All other woodwinds blow through a reed. The Oboe has a sweet, wistful sound."**

\*[possibly omitted]

**“A larger kind of oboe, with a plaintive voice, is the *English Horn*.”**

\*

**“Clarinets come in many sizes.**

[In the pause:]

**They play very high—and low—and can be very quick.**

[ In next pause:]

**Clarinets can be smooth and mellow—or rough, or shrill.”**

**“Singing sadly up high, and darkly down low, here is the tall, deep *Bassoon*.”**

\*[possibly omitted]

**“Even lower, with an ominous, buzzing voice, is the *Contrabassoon*.”**

\*

**“*Saxophones* have *metal* tubes for a special sound. We have three sizes. They can be sarcastic or sincere, coarse or delicate.”**

\*[possibly omitted]

**“The *String Bass* is a regular guest. Its strings are bowed or plucked. It can be solemn and dignified; expressive, and nimble.”**

\*[possibly omitted]

**“Now a special guest: The ringing strings of the lovely *Harp* add glittering elegance.”**

\*

**"The Brass players buzz the lips through a metal mouthpiece. First, the brilliant, heroic *Trumpets*. Then, the strong, noble, slide *Trombones*."**

**“Now, the round, warm sound of the gallant *French Horns*.”**

[In the pause]

**"If it sounds like a baby tuba,**

[In the pause]

**a nimble, jolly showoff,**

[In the pause]

**it's the *Euphonium*."**

**"Now, the biggest, lowest brass instrument.**

**The powerful *Tuba* can be moody, and romantic, too."**

**"Now the tuneful percussion.**

**The keyboard percussion have rows of flat bars."**

**"The glistening metal *Glockenspiel* sounds like a music box."**

**"The dreamy metal *Vibraphone* has a liquid, pulsing sound."**

**"The wooden bars of the *Xylophone* give a brittle clatter.**

**"The deeper wooden *Marimba* gives a mellow resonance."**

**"The *Chimes* are long hanging metal tubes. They sound like church-tower bells."**

**"Tuned drumheads stretched over great metal bowls give dramatic, commanding tones. Here are the majestic *Timpani*."**

[Music: drum vamp, speak in the rhythmic gaps, see notation below]

**"The other Percussion have *no tune*, just high or low sounds—and pure rhythm.**

**Some are *drums* . . . all sizes.**

**Some are *metal* . . . *ringing* metal.**

**Some are *wood* . . . with, a *dry* sound.**

**Some *rasp* or *scrape* . . . or *jingle* or *rattle*.**

**And some just go *Snap! Clink! Pop!* or *Clonk!***

**Now *all* the tuneless percussion together. *Hang on to your hat!*"**

[Narrator exits.]

VARIATION P - Percussion

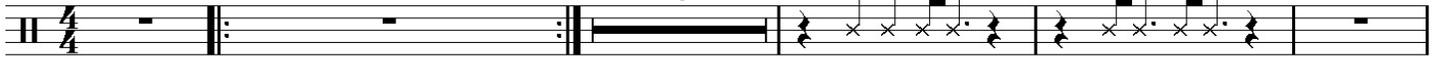
Narrator

545

VAMP (SAFETY)

2

550

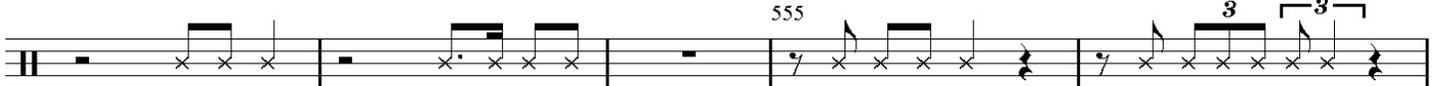


"THE OTHER PERCUSSION  
HAVE NO TUNE, JUST HIGH  
OR LOW SOUNDS--AND  
PURE RHYTHM.  
SOME ARE *DRUMS*... ALL SIZES."

547-548

"SOME ARE METAL..."

"RINGING METAL".



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"SOME ARE WOOD"...

"WITH A DRY SOUND".

"SOME RASP OR SCRAPE..."

"OR JINGLE OR RATTLE..."

*poco rit.*



"AND SOME JUST GO  
'SNAP! CLINK! POP!'  
OR 'CLONK!'  
NOW ALL THE  
**TUNELESS**  
PERCUSSION  
TOGETHER. HANG ON  
TO YOUR HAT!"  
(Narrator EXITS.)