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."

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

"Clarinets come in many sizes. They play very high—and low—and can be very quick. Clarinets can be smooth and mellow—or rough, or shrill."

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

*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."

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

*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."
"If it sounds like a baby tuba,
a nimble, jolly showoff,
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.]
VAMP (SAFETY)

"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..."

poco rit.

"AND SOME JUST GO SNAP! CLINK! POP!" OR 'CLONK!' NOW ALL THE TUNELESS PERCUSSION TOGETHER, HANG ON TO YOUR HAT!"

(Narrator EXITS.)