

Avshalomov—Lifeboat Variations Narration and Stage Business

NOTES: Optional cuts in the musical score, if used by the conductor, affect what sections or versions of the narration you will say in certain spots. Alternate versions or text that may need to be skipped are in brackets, along with notes on the music at that moment or player actions. A few variations segue into the next one. Here the narration before the first covers both.

Allow for spontaneous applause, especially with variations with big endings, but never milk it. If there is any applause, strong or half-hearted, simply acknowledge it with a nod or a smile. No solo bows for anyone. Then MOVE ON.

OPTIONAL SINGALONG INTRODUCTION

Narrator (or conductor) walks onstage, bows simply, waits for near-silence, then sings, medium loud, *no microphone*, in the key of C (get your note backstage):

**“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 alert the audience to sing along the second time. Cue them all to start, right in time after the end of your last phrase; if they hesitate, gesture encouragement to sing out. As they finish their verse, make it a Round: gesture to show successive starts in 4 groups/parts. (Example: 1) Left floor 2) Right floor 3) Center floor 4) Back or balcony). Without pause after their first verse (keep the tempo), start each group in succession with a cue and by singing the first phrase with them. At the end of each group’s first repetition, show each to repeat by a circular gesture. After 2 or 3 times through (your choice), cut each group off in turn at the end of “dream”. Let group 4 finish alone with no cutoff. Allow for brief nervous laughter, possible applause.

(If first time with all is too timid, show them all to repeat and make encouraging gestures to sing louder. Possibly stop them then and show 4 groups, then restart.)

Conductor then cues the start of the Lifeboat Variations immediately.

NARRATION

[Music: first full-band phrase, fade to solo clarinet.]

“This is a concert band. Or—a symphonic wind ensemble.

Why *wind*? Two groups of players, woodwind and brass, blow air (or *wind*), through their instruments. The third group—percussion—play by hitting their instruments.”

[still in bar 5]

“The woodwind are mostly *wooden tubes*. [players show briefly]. The brass are *metal tubes* [show], and the percussion are made of wood [show], or metal , [show], or hollow drums” [show].

NOTE: Optional demonstration—Conductor may ask the players in advance to do some simple showing of their instruments at this point, each time on cue at the note [show] in the narration texts.

First the woodwind players and then the brass players hold up and then lower just the bodies of their instruments (NOT flutes, harp, cellos, or string bass).

Bass Clarinet, ContraAlto Clarinet, Contrabass Clarinet, Bassoons. Contrabassoon, Baritone Saxophone, just *tilt* instrument slightly sideways and back. Tuba: no movement.

Percussion hold up woodblock and temple blocks, then triangle and one cymbal; then tambourine, snare drum on stand, and tilt the bass drum side to side if it is on a rotating stand.

Then [for the optional **Excursus**] woodwind hold up (and then lower) just their reeds (or mouthpieces), then brass hold up their mouthpieces, then percussion raise their sticks; *each group just before playing*.

(Flutes and piccolo do not participate here, they get a chance to show their instruments during the narration for their solo variation.)

EXCURSUS

“Most woodwinds have split cane reeds [show] to buzz.”

[Music: woodwinds play on reeds or mouthpieces only. Likely laughter.]

[bar 6]

“The brass players buzz their lips, through hollow metal mouthpieces.”

[Show]

[Music: brass play on mouthpieces only. Likely laughter.]

[bar 7]

“But the percussion players use sticks [Show], mallets [Show], and beaters.”[Show]

[Music: percussion play sticks only. Likely laughter.]

[bar 8]

“When they put all the pieces together...”

[End of Excursus]

[bar 9]

“... the three groups—*woodwinds, brass, percussion*—sound like this:”

[Music: Three variations, connects. Likely applause after percussion cadence.]

[bar 29]

“Did you recognize our theme—‘Row your boat’? Each group just played a *variation* on it. Now let’s hear a fresh variation for *each kind of instrument*.”

“First the woodwinds.”

“Now, ancient flutes *were* wooden tubes, but modern flutes are *metal tubes*.

[flutes and picc. show]. **The players blow across a *hole* in the side, like tooting on a soda bottle. Here is the pure, clear sound of the nimble *flutes*, and the tiny, sparkling *piccolo*.”**

[bar 61]

[If no Excursus: “All the other woodwinds use a split cane *reed* that buzzes when you blow through it.”]

[bar 61]

“The *oboe* has a sweet, wistful sound.”

*[possibly omitted]

[bar 73]

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

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[music: over English Horn’s last long-held note, bar 80:]

“The *Clarinets* come in many sizes.”

[music: low clarinets start vamp. In the pause (bar 83):]

“They play very high—and low—and can be very quick.”

[In next pause (bar 87):]

“The clarinet sound can be smooth and mellow—or rough, or shrill.”

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[bar 149]

“Now the bass relative of the oboe. Singing sadly up high, and darkly down low, here is the tall, deep *Bassoon*.”

*[possibly omitted]

[bar 182]

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

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[bar 198]

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

*[possibly omitted]

[bar226]

“Our band has borrowed some *string* instruments from the orchestra. Their strings are stroked with a bow or plucked. The noble *Cello* adds a refined singing sound.” [Continue to Bass narration if both are present.]

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[bar 226, cont.]

“The *String Bass* is a regular addition to a concert band.” [If no cello, add: “Its strings are stroked with a bow or plucked.”] **“The Bass sounds solemn and dignified; it can be expressive and nimble, too.”**

*[possibly omitted]

[bar259]

“Now a special guest: Plucked and strummed, its ringing strings add glittering elegance. Here is the lovely *Harp*.”

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[bar 283]

“Next, the *Brass* instruments. [If no Excursus: “They are played by buzzing the lips through a hollow metal mouthpiece while blowing.”]

“We start with the highest—the brilliant, heroic *Cornets* and *Trumpets*. Then, their low-pitched relatives, the strong, noble, slide *Trombones*.”

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[bar 326]

“In the middle range comes the round, warm sound of the gallant *French Horns*.”

[bar 358]

“If it sounds like a supercharged horn and looks like a baby tuba, it’s a *Euphonium*—nimble and brassy. Then comes the full-sized *Bass Tuba*—the

biggest brass instrument, and the solid deep bass for the whole band. The little Euphonium is a spry, jolly showoff. The towering, powerful Tuba can be moody, and romantic, too.”

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[bar 419]

“Now the *Percussion* instruments. [If no Excursus: “They are played by hitting with sticks, beaters, or mallets.”] “First the ones that can play a tune.”

“The *Keyboard Percussion* have two long rows of flat bars.”

“The ringing *metal* keyboards are [/a ringing metal keyboard is] the glistening *Glockenspiel*.”

*[possibly omitted:

“, and the dreamy *Vibraphone*, with a liquid, pulsing sound.”]

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[bar 435]

“The *wooden* bars of the high-pitched *Xylophone* give out a brittle clatter . . .

*[possibly omitted:

“. . . while the deeper *Marimba* gives a mellow resonance.”]

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[bar 471]

“ The *Chimes* are rows of long hanging metal tubes. Their open-air sound is like church-tower bells.”

[bar 479]

“ Drumheads stretched over great metal bowls give tuneful, commanding drumbeats. Here are the majestic kettledrums, or *Timpani*.”

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[Music: drum vamp. At Bar 532:]

“The other Percussion have *no tune*, just high or low sounds, and pure rhythm. You will hear different types:

[Speak these in the spaces in the music. Keep a rough beat, but not mechanically rhythmic. The first line is still over the vamp; the conductor can show you in the score.]

[still bar 532] **“Some are *drums* . . . all sizes.”**

[bar 535] **“Some are *metal* . . . [536] *ringing metal*.”**

[bar 538] **“Some are *wood* . . . [539] with a *dry* sound.”**

[bar 541] **“Some *rasp* or *scrape*. . . [542] or *jingle* or *rattle*.”**

[bar 545] **“And some just go *Snap! Clink! Pop! or Clonk!*”**

“Now, just for fun, *all* the tuneless percussion together. *Hang on to your hats!*”

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[bar 662a]

“Well, it’s time for the Grand Finale. It’s a *Cornucopia*—a magical ‘Horn of Plenty.’ This one is full of more *rounds*. See how many you count before they start coming ‘round again. *Ready or not* . . . “

[Music: Conductor starts Finale *right* after the narrator’s last word. Narrator exits discreetly during the first loud phrases.]

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