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 one covers both.

Allow for spontaneous applause, especially with variations with big endings, but never milk it. If there is any applause, either strong or half-hearted, 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 note 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 (all together in unison), cue them all to start, right in time after the end of your last phrase. (The band may sing too, but do not cue them.) Cut the audience off after the end of “dream”, smile encouragement. If they didn’t sing much or strongly, gesture encouragement, and try once more, cutting them off at the end.

Then gesture to show numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and division of the audience into 4 groups/parts. Example: 1) Left floor 2) Right floor 3) Back floor 4) Balcony or side bleachers.

Start each group with a cue and by singing one phrase with them, in 1 2 3 4 sequence. Show them 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 no applause, or once it has mostly died down, conductor 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. Two groups of players, woodwind and brass, blow air (or wind) through their instruments. The third group—percussion—play by hitting their instruments.”

“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 with stretched skin heads” [show].

NOTE: Optional demonstration—Conductor may ask the players in advance to do some simple showing of their instruments at this point (in groups), each time on cue at the note [show] in the narration texts. Pace this with the conductor’s cues.

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EXCURSUS

“Most woodwinds have split cane reeds to buzz.”
[Music: woodwinds play on reeds or mouthpieces only. Likely laughter.]

“The brass players buzz their lips, through hollow metal mouthpieces.”
[Music: brass play on mouthpieces only. Likely laughter.]

“But the percussion players use sticks, mallets, and beaters.”
[Music: percussion play sticks only. Likely laughter.]

“When they put all the pieces together…”

[End of Excursus]

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“… the three groups—woodwinds, brass, percussion—sound like this:”
[Music: Three variations, connects. Likely applause after percussion cadence.]

“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.”

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

“The oboe has a sweet, wistful sound.”

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

[Music: over English Horn’s last long-held note:]  
“The Clarinets come in many sizes.”
[Music: low clarinets start vamp. In the pause:]  
“They play very high—and low—and can be very quick.”
[In next pause:]  
“The clarinet sound can be smooth and mellow—or rough, or shrill.”

*[possibly omitted]  
“Now the bass relative of the oboe. Singing sadly up high, and darkly down low, here is the tall, deep Bassoon.”
“Even longer and lower, with an ominous, buzzing voice, is the Contrabassoon.”

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

“The String Bass is a regular addition to a concert band. Its strings are stroked with a bow, or plucked. The Bass sounds solemn and dignified; it can be expressive, and nimble, too.”

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

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

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

“Now, in the middle range, the round, warm sound of the gallant French Horns.”

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

“Now the Percussion instruments. [If no Excursus: “The players hit them with sticks, beaters, or mallets.”] “First the tuneful ones.”

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

“The ringing metal keyboards are the glistening Glockenspiel (or Orchestra Bells), like a music box, and the dreamy Vibraphone, with a liquid, pulsing sound.”
“The wooden bars of the high-pitched Xylophone give a brittle clatter . . .
*[possibly omitted:
  “. . . while the deeper Marimba gives a mellow resonance.”]*
*
“ The Chimes are rows of long hanging metal tubes. Their open-air sound is like church-tower bells.”

“ Tuned drumheads stretched over great metal bowls give dramatic, commanding tones. Here are the majestic kettledrums, or Timpani.”

* [Music: drum vamp.:]
“The other Percussion have no tune, just high or low sounds, and pure rhythm.

[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 will cue you for the others; where there are 2 phrases, the drums leave a rhythmic gap for your words.]
“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 go Snap! Clink! Pop! or Clonk!”

“Now all the tuneless percussion together. Hang on to your hats!”

[Narrator sits.]
“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 come ‘round again. Ready or not . . .”

[Music: Conductor starts full Cornucopia right after the narrator’s last word. Narrator exits discreetly during the quiet buildup of Row Your Boat after the loud opening.]