

# GAGARIN

by  
NIGEL CLARKE

## COMPOSER'S NOTE

'**GAGARIN**' was written for Dr Matthew George and the University of St. Thomas Symphonic Wind Ensemble in Minnesota, USA

'**GAGARIN**' is written in three movements. **1. Road to the Stars**  
**2. Orbit**  
**3. Homecoming**

Yuri Alexeyevich Gagarin was the Soviet farmboy who became the first man in space. He was born on 9 March 1934, and this work celebrates his 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It was not until 1961 that the wider world heard of his name. His short life spanned the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most traumatic times from the turmoil of the Second World War in Russia, through to the cold war at the height of which Gagarin served as an officer in the Soviet Airforce. It was against the backdrop of the cold war that the two main post war superpowers competed to launch the first man into space.

Twenty of the Soviet Union's exceptional test pilots were selected from a list of over 2000 and put through arduous training. Only one was to be chosen to be the first cosmonaut in space. Gagarin was the man the authorities selected for this historical flight, the decision being taken only a few weeks before the actual launch. His rocket, now world famous, was 'Vostok 1'.

The launch took place in a specially made launch station in the south of the republic of Kazakhstan at Baikonur. There were many disasters and deaths that paved the way to this event. Only weeks before the launch, 190 men died when a rocket exploded at the Baikonur site. It was doubtful whether Gagarin knew about this as the whole project was shrouded in secrecy.

By today's standards the whole launch process was primitive, but on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1961 Yuri Gagarin orbited Earth for 108 minutes before returning to Earth and landing near the village of Smelkovka in the Saratov region. His return to Earth was reported to be witnessed by one or two local country people. As knowledge of the mission was confined to a privileged few, for them it must have been an unnerving sight.

Gagarin's experience obviously had a profound effect on him: after his orbit he said '*Circling the earth in the orbital spaceship I marvelled at the beauty of our planet. People of the world, let us safeguard and enhance this beauty – not destroy it!*'

In Gagarin's own official account of events 'Road to the Stars' he describes that at the moment of launch he heard an ever-growing din and felt the rocket tremble all over before it slowly lifted off. He also spoke of a huge range of musical tones, pitches and timbres that no composer or set of musical instruments or voices could ever duplicate.

Gagarin became a national hero after his courageous mission, but although he gained world-wide recognition, he was never allowed to fly in space again. He died tragically on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1968 whilst flying his MiG-15UTI jet.

In 'Gagarin' I have tried to capture the spirit of the times. 'Road to the Stars' concentrates on the excitement of those involved, the strength of Gagarin's character and the launch itself. 'Orbit' looks at the exhilaration that Gagarin might have experienced and the impression that seeing Earth from space would have had on him. 'Homecoming' is a celebration in the form of a Russian folk dance. At various moments in the work I use fragments of the Soviet national anthem 'Sing to the Motherland, home of the free' (now revised and adopted as the Russian national anthem).

**NIGEL CLARKE** began his musical career as a trumpeter but a developing interest in composition, stimulated by the New Polish School of composers, took him to the Royal Academy of Music to study with Paul Patterson. Here his striking originality and capacity for hard work were recognised by several significant awards including the Josiah Parker Prize adjudicated by Sir Michael Tippett and the Queen's Commendation for Excellence – the Royal Academy of Music's highest distinction. A British Council Scholarship enabled him to participate in the 8<sup>th</sup> Summer School for Young Composers in Poland, where he studied the works of Penderecki and Lutoslawski. Nigel Clarke was previously Head of Composition at the London College of Music and Media and is currently a guest professor at the Xinjiang Arts Institute in north-west China and Associate Composer to the Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall. In recent years Nigel has co-written the soundtracks to a number of major feature films.