



GREG BROWN once photographed *Star Trek*'s Leonard Nimoy ("Mr. Spock") on a high-school newspaper assignment. www.GregBrownFlyingCarpet.com

STAR POWER

For pilots to be interested in space and science fiction is only logical, but few of us personally experience the interface. I met aspiring aviator Chris Barton when he was executive director of the Flagstaff Symphony Orchestra. From our first launch on local flying adventures, my friend was captivated by Meteor Crater and the volcanic landscape where Apollo astronauts trained for moon missions. I should have guessed he was a sci-fi fan.

Our friendship and Chris's flying were interrupted when he joined Florida's Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra (OPO) as executive director. So when he returned recently to Flagstaff for a concert, I delighted in retrieving him by *Flying Carpet* from Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport.

My first moments with Chris were consumed by departure and taxi clearances, but then we received an early north turnout from Sky Harbor's south runway. Chris *oohed* and *ahhed* as we swooped over futuristic terminals and constellations of docked jetliners. After escaping congested airspace I asked,



Chris Barton (left) with Jonathan Frakes, who played Cmdr. William Riker in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

"What's new?" expecting family and business news.

"Actually, you won't believe it!" said Chris. Just a week earlier the Orlando Philharmonic had played a surprise performance at *Star Wars Celebration Orlando 2017*, in memory of the late Carrie Fisher (who played Princess Leia). Planning was so secretive that even OPO musicians didn't know the assignment until legendary film composer John Williams assumed the baton at dress rehearsal. Surely, I'm not the only aviator to hum his *Star Wars*, *Jaws*, and *Indiana Jones* soundtracks during heroic aerial adventures—and Chris got to meet him in person.

"We helped *Star Wars* fans around the world celebrate Carrie Fisher in a most beautiful way," said Chris, listing director George Lucas, Harrison Ford (Han Solo, and GA pilot), Mark Hamill (Luke Skywalker), and other original cast members appearing at the event. He paused while I switched radio frequencies.

"But there's more!" interrupted Chris when I offered eager questions. That same afternoon, Jonathan Frakes—who played Cmdr. William Riker (Number One) in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*—had arrived to guest-narrate OPO's unrelated Sci-Fi Spectacular concert. Coincidentally, his series costar Michael Dorn (Worf, also a pilot) was starring in a local play, and Chris got to hang out with them.

"It was all I could do to contain my internal 13-year-old fanboy while interacting professionally with these folks," he said. "What a thrill and honor it is to do what I do." By now Flagstaff filled our windshield, extending our conversation to the return trip.

"One reason I love piloting is that we humans aren't supposed to be able to fly—or visit distant galaxies, or travel faster than light," observed Chris three days later. "What's so cool about *Star Trek* is its optimistic view of the future—who we can be and what we can accomplish." He excitedly snapped an alien starship flying formation final with us to Sky Harbor—a Southwest 737 inbound to the parallel runway.

"Now for the boring part of the trip," Chris quipped as he hopped the airline shuttle. "You know, Greg, all the original NASA astronauts were pilots first. Flying is as close to science fiction as we'll likely get!" **FT**