

Red Devil Sizzlers

by John Bentley Mays

Most city folk who still attend some traditional church or synagogue, and probably all outright pagans, would probably find themselves bemused by the promo for Inspiration '93, a trade fair of ecclesiastical technology to take place next month in Burlington, Ont.

Described as "four dynamic days of cutting-edge seminars, workshops, choral readings and exhibits," Inspiration '93, according to the flyer, will feature displays of such unusual worship aids as bass guitars, backdrops, lighting dimmers, "sound effects libraries", "video walls", and audio carts.

Several workshops on the use of this and other novel equipment are advertised. Participants can learn about the "latest in Bible Software," "how a MIDI-equipped organ can become a dynamic instrument in your ministry," (MIDI is the acronym for Musical Instrument Digital Interface. I regret that I cannot explain how this device works, or how it could give "unlimited musical possibilities" to some old two-manual wheezer, as promised in the brochure.)

The prospective visitor is also invited to "learn the applications of dimmers, mixers and gels to change moods and set atmosphere to cover all events," and to discover the mind-expanding possibilities of teleconferencing, "a coming technology that major Religious organizations are looking into."

The most intriguing seminar on the roster, however, is called Using Pyrotechnics in Religious Settings.

That's because *everybody* loves fireworks. If you have thought (as I always have) that solemn Anglican Evensong, complete with incense, glorious anthems and choral psalms and chants, is a quite satisfactory way to honour the Divinity, imagine what some spark-spitting pinwheels on the altar, fire-trails of sparkle-rockets in the nave, and a few Red Devil sizzlers in the chancel would add to this much-loved service. While it's admittedly hard to picture such a thing, you can bet your last Roman candle that an Evensong with fireworks would not be the serious, thoughtful occasion it's always been.

But that seems to be exactly what all the gizmos and workshops are about: inventing popular, sensuously ecstatic alternatives to the low-tech, bookish, predictable services standard in all main-line churches and synagogues of North America. ◆