

**CONFEST
WANGARATTA
1984
"MAKING ALTERNATIVES WORK"**

Down To Earth is holding its 1984 ConFest on a tranquil treed site between the Ovens River and the Ovens Highway east of Wangaratta. The Festival will run from 29th December 1983 to 2nd January 1984.

Festival activities will include Workshops, discussions, slides, films, and static and working displays on such topics as: Alternative technology, permaculture agriculture, environmental issues, yoga, meditation, alternative medicine and diet, personal growth and human relations, astrology, education, life games, music and dance.

All the above activities are pertinent to the ConFest theme "Making alternatives work". They are what have worked for us, and will go on working. They embody the love, the co-operation, and the sharing that we generate.

On the eve of 1984, Orwell's year, it is also appropriate that we examine the problems that we haven't solved, and the new problems which face us. We are confronted by: unemployment, economic deprivation, sexism, racism, nuclear proliferation, adulteration of our food, decimation of our environment, and other horrors.

Therefore, following on from our ConFest '82 Community Politics Village, we are going to focus on Conferencing. Selected speakers will lead conferences and workshops on the topics of: Alternative economics/employment, communities, and conservation/ecology. These speakers will deliver papers which may be published later, and it is hoped that we will achieve decisions on possible courses of co-operative action for the future.

ConFest facilities will include: a supervised children's village, a small stage for music, drama and poetry, a craft market. A food market will sell nourishing vegetarian food. Milk and ice will be delivered daily. Participants need only bring a minimum of shelter, eating utensils, and some food if they wish to prepare their own. It is suggested that sun protection and stout shoes will lighten the load at the first aid tent.

There will be adequate parking provided as well as a specified area for campervans, caravans, and motorcyclists who wish to camp with their bikes. In the latter area it will be a case of "Take it there and leave it until you go." No vehicles other than authorised site vehicles will be driven on site. In any event, Wangaratta is only 18 km from the site — why not come by train and cycle out?

We hope that people will come to relax, to enjoy themselves, to participate, to learn if they wish to, and to be free. The only "rules" we will impose are in the interest of Public Health and Safety.

They are: Strictly no pets allowed.
Camp in specified areas only.
No soap, detergents, or sewage in the river.
Care for the environment!

Admission prices are as follows:

Tickets purchased by 1st December 1983	\$15.00
Price at gate	\$25.00
Concession at gate, with proof	\$20.00
People under 16	free

Tickets and further information are available from
Down To Earth (Victoria) Co-Operative Society
Ltd.,
285-287 Little Lonsdale Street,
Melbourne, 3000 Telephone: (03) 663 1561

Our office is staffed on Fridays between 10.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m.

Tickets are also on sale at the
Edgar Cayce Bookshop,
Shop 5, Glencentre Arcade,
Glenferrie Road,
Hawthorn, 3122 Telephone (03) 818 1998

(by Lance Nash & Co-ordinators)

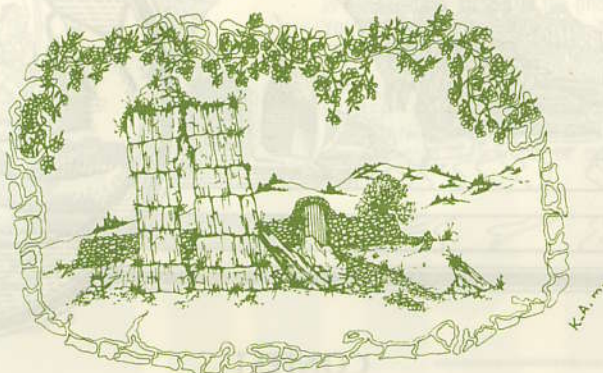


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SYNOPSIS OF THE HISTORY OF THE DOWN TO EARTH MOVEMENT. by George Schmidt.



Because of my involvement with this movement from the early days of the Cotter Confest, I want to put the history of this movement on paper so as to share it with many people who did not have this involvement. Like all 'historians' my perceptions are biased because of the simple fact that I can speak only from my own experiences, which of course, are to some extent different from those of other people/historians'. Things that happened influenced me in a way which by necessity is different from others. With this proviso in mind, I offer this synopsis of the 'History of Down To Earth'.

The now famous "Aquarius Festival" of 1973.

In Australia we initially followed the overseas trend of protest against the format and state in which our western societies had been developed, for example Woodstock USA. For those who cannot remember, Woodstock USA was the zenith of protest by the 'under 30 generation' against a society which had become so deeply entrenched in materialism that it could only find its culmination in the insanity of the Vietnam War. The 'under 30 generation' used mainly songs to voice their protest — and drugs to show their individuality from and opposition to the older generation. Their songs are still living when you hear music by groups such as the 'Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young' combo.

However, in 1973, many of the young people in Australia found this form of expression not satisfying enough. A large number of the students of the University of N.S.W. and the University of Sydney, plus a number of people from other segments of our society, decided to try out another format of searching for an alternative to the structure of our society. This culminated in the now famous "Aquarius Festival" of 1973, held near Nimbin in northern N.S.W. At this festival practically all aspects of the structure of our society were looked into and means to change those aspects were explored.

This festival was the first of its kind organised by non-professionals and it had an unbelievably high content of spiritual warmth. The emotional value of it is still not quite adequately understood or measured.

Out of this festival grew the so-called "Rainbow Region", stretching from Lismore to the coast, and from the Queensland border (thanks to Joh.) to Grafton. Thousands of people decided to stay behind and actually try to bring into practise what they had collectively experienced during the "Aquarius Festival", i.e. attempting to practise living and building an "Alternative Society".

About a year later, Dr. Jim Cairns, who by that time was one of the most known politicians, because of his involvement with the anti-Vietnam-marches, called a conference with the object of looking into ways and means of changing our society.

Many people who were fired by the ideals displayed at the "Aquarius Festival" and who could not yet leave the cities, answered his call. One of them suggested that this new grouping be called 'Down To Earth', based on the name of a similar gathering in Canada earlier that year. This name was accepted by the people at that conference and collectively they decided to help Dr. Cairns to organise a "Conference and Festival" — hence the amalgam "ConFest". This first "ConFest" was eventually held at the banks of the Cotter River in the A.C.T.

The ConFest of "Recognising the Fellow Travellers Amongst Us."

This 'Cotter ConFest' created an euphoric state of recognising in each other a "fellow traveller" in the quest for a better society. A large number of overseas personalities were invited to speak, names like Eva Reich and Stephen Askin of 'The Farm Tennessee' spring to mind. Remember, those were the days that we here in Australia were still greatly impressed by all things overseas and that we didn't recognise that we Australians are quite capable of doing our own number.

The collective euphoria was so high, however, that when Dr. Cairns called for volunteers to organise a follow-up ConFest, many answered his call. This call resulted in the "Bredbo ConFest". This Bredbo ConFest was quite different from the previous one in that this time we tried to get down to a more serious way of finding the right methods to change our society. Because of the structure of the group which organised this confest, we never quite made a realistic assessment — or line of direction, if you wish to call it that — of our collective goals. The ingrained trait of our society, where each individual or group tries to prove its own validity at the expense of others, instead of working co-operatively towards a common goal, proved to be too strong.

The ConFest of "Determined Search."

Where i would describe the Cotter confest as the festival of 'Recognising the Fellow Travellers Amongst Us', i would describe Bredbo as the festival of the 'Determined Search'.

For numerous reasons, Bredbo became a watershed in the alternative movement. One very large segment of the participants became extremely disillusioned with — what they conceived rightly or wrongly — the autocratic and paternalistic way the overall organisation was conducted. They suspected the mysterious way the site was chosen, which unlike several other sites suggested for the festival, turned out to be very rugged, barren and isolated. The decision to buy the site was highly suspected and so was the financial organisation. This large group turned away from the D.T.E. movement and its loss is still felt this day in many subtle ways.



Interfacing my personal view here: both as participant and workshop leader at Bredbo, and co-organiser of several other confests since, i happen to know that the finding of a suitable site is extremely difficult and fraught with arguments and hassles. Where the criticism of the financial organisation is concerned, we have a prime example of society's ingrained trait to rip each other off — as in up to 50% of the participants didn't pay their entrance fee! — and the dichotomy between too much and too little trust between the organisers, otherwise described as slack organisation.

Where the buying of the site is concerned: i still trust Dr. Cairn's sincerity and his honourable sense of commitment to the spirit of the idea. Not sitting in the 'hot seat' of being saddled with the ownership of this property i find it impossible to express a clear view with regard to execution of this commitment. I wish that others would be less vocal about this matter and display their ingrained trait of distrust rather than of co-operation.



Anyhow, so a large group became disillusioned but a small group decided that they were not going to 'throw in the towel', meaning that they were going to practise the basic law of a sane society i.e.: taking responsibility for their own actions. It were these people who came together at "Earth Haven", a growth-centre which i conducted in Sherbrooke near Melbourne.

Out of respect for Dr. Cairns, and because of other considerations (finances), we accepted Dr. Cairns to be again the Convener for the next confest. This one was to be held in South Australia, in accordance with a sound policy of bringing a confest to the people and sharing energy, rather than making people come to it. This next confest eventuated at the banks of the Murray River near Berri.

The ConFest of "Co-operation and Tranquillity."

The Berri ConFest became famous for its superb, unobtrusive and behind the scenes organisation and its "laid-back" vibes. This was a truly nationally organised Confest with members of the D.T.E. Families (as they became to be known) from Queensland, West & South Australia, New South Wales and the Australian Capital and Northern Territories all doing specified tasks. The South Australians excelled in organisational talents and gentle but firm guidance. It was the very first large scale festival which was an astonishing success in emotional, societal and financial terms.

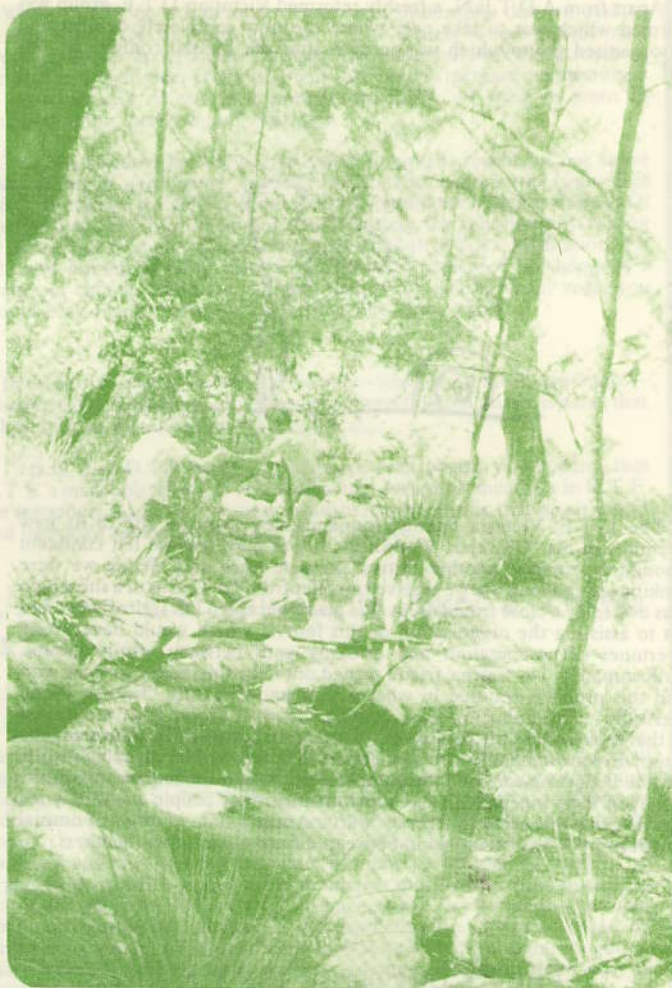


photo Brian Lavery.

This confest i would describe as the confest "Co-operation and Tranquillity".

The main outcome of this confest was that most participants got the feeling that the 'Alternative Movement' had reached its zenith, that it had achieved what it set out to do and that all there was left was to go home and practise at home what they had learned at the various confests.

Again, it was left to a smaller group to see that the changes in society cannot be wrought overnight but that such an endeavour needs long-term planning and lots of work, perhaps even as long as a generation.



Meanwhile, while these confests were happening in the Eastern States, the West Australia Family held a couple of very successful confests in their State. The confest at Nanga in particular was extremely successful. Because of the inevitable distance, our West Australian Family has adopted a more independent stance in their search for an alternative society.

The same can be said of the D.T.E. movement in Tasmania. The Tasmanian Family held a small (500 people) and very beautiful ConFest at Jackie's Marsh, almost in the heart of their State.

The Queensland Family, also because of distance, have adopted an independent stance and have been organising much more laid-back and much less organised gatherings in the southern part of their State.

So, after the Berri ConFest, there was an upsurge in the alternative movement. To so-called A.D.T.E.N. group was formed, being an amalgam of 'Australian Down To Earth Network' consisting of representatives from all D.T.E. Families. A.D.T.E.N. also was to be the body which would formulate the till now rather hazy guidelines as to what a so-called "Alternative Society" was supposed to be made up of and to formulate clearer description of the philosophies involved. This was called the 'Group of Twelve', of which I was one of the members.

Apart from A.D.T.E.N. a freshly reformed Victorian D.T.E. group was formed which was to take over where the now completely defunct and disorganised group which was formed after the Bredbo confest had left off.



The D.T.E. Victoria Family, found its new lease on life in its new premises in the 'Universal Workshop'. It was here that we felt confident enough to organise another festival on state lines only. While we were looking around for a site we received an offer from Dr. Cairns of a site which was owned by a close friend of his. We gladly accepted Dr. Cairns' offer and set to assisting the organisation of this festival which would have strong overtones of co-operation and bridging gaps between ethnic groups. Unfortunately, Dr. Cairns' friend turned out to be impossible to work with and this problem resulted in what is now known as the "French Island Kerfuffle". This unfortunate incident had however a more positive side to it in that it spelled out the parameters of influence between Dr. Cairns and the alternative movement. It could be described in terms of family relationship, i.e. the fledgeling sons and daughters served notice on the patriarch of the family of their independence. Unfortunately, many people could only see and describe this event in terms of warfare, rather than in terms of normal progression of any relationship between differently attuned members.

The "ConFest of the Children."

Shortly after this debacle, however, we found a site for our first State-ConFest at Glenlyon near Daylesford. Despite several problems, mainly financial, we managed to get together an amazingly well organised confest. The most telling point was the fact that the members themselves got the money together for setting up this confest. This was the first time that such a commitment happened. No loans from any one specific person or outside organisation was required. The festival aspect turned out to be extremely popular with all participants, same with the conference/workshop aspect and most of all, the co-operation with the local population was as good if not better than at any other festival. If ever we tried to fuse our energies with those of the locality around a ConFest, we certainly succeeded here!

The most outstanding feature of this ConFest were the children. The caring, loving and warm interaction between adults and children at this confest had to be seen to be believed. The children's attitude was truly amazing in that there was hardly a child which displayed the all too common dependency on adults which is taken as normal at any other gathering of this size.

This ConFest I would like to describe as "The Confest of the Children".



Almost simultaneously with the efforts of the Victorian Family, the A.D.T.E.N. group had decided to hold a National ConFest. Based on well-established policy we decided to have this ConFest in N.S.W. and that it was to be a ConFest with a difference. The difference being that the workshop aspect was to be separated and would be conducted in depth by various communities in the Rainbow Region. Each community would conduct a specific workshop for the duration of 3 to 10 days and each workshop was to be recorded audio-visually and a report was to be written of the conclusions arrived at by the participants of each workshop. For protection of the environment and the people living in the area, the location of each workshop and its community would only be made known to the participants of such workshop. This was another drastic departure of the 'smorgasbord' aspect of previous ConFests. Firstly, for the first time in the history of ConFests, workshops were to be conducted in depth instead on the usual inevitable superficiality. Secondly, papers were to be produced at the conclusion of a workshop and — where possible — an audio-visual record would be made. These records would then be shown at the participants of the Festival aspect of the ConFest, which was to be held at the conclusion of the workshops on a property/community known as "Wyaliba". "Wyaliba" was one of the communities in northern N.S.W. where A.D.T.E.N. decided to put its combined energy into in order to assist it through sharing our energies and finances.



Unfortunately, drought followed by unbelievable heavy floods threw the whole of the organisation completely out of kilter and all that was left were a few workshops, some of them rather ad hoc, and an impromptu festival near Uki and Mount Warning. From all accounts received, this festival could be described as the festival of "Improvisation". By the way: Mount Warning is reported to be the first point in Australia where we can observe the rising morning sun. This coincidence may be of significance, I hope.

Because of the energy spent and the financial losses of this, literally washed-out ConFest, the A.D.T.E.N. and many other D.T.E. Families lost their momentum and are currently defunct. Fortunately, there is the proverbial golden lining around the clouds in that the Queensland, Victorian and West-Australian D.T.E. Families stayed alive and well. As a matter of fact, our W.A. Family also held a week long seminar where the "Alternative Movement" was studied in great depth. We had their 150-page report in our files at one stage, but it disappeared.

Despite the various setbacks in the energy levels of the other D.T.E. Families, we here in Victoria managed to hold another ConFest at Glenlyon. It was a good confest, especially the music side of it was superbly put together. The proximity to a larger town, the accessibility of the site and the much more relaxed way in which access was policed, created the opportunity for some local vandals to create a few minor problems. There was a tendency by some of the members of the Family to be a wee bit officious and this too created some unpleasantness. A new aspect was the creation of a 'political village' where workshops on alternative forms of politics were held. Because of the influx of so many new members into the D.T.E. Family there is the inevitable change going on which became apparent in the tendency to organise rather than create a ConFest.



And at this point, I find it necessary to give a summing-up of what it is that the D.T.E. Families try to achieve at their ConFests.

Firstly, we try to bring together a number of people with expertise in a great variety of areas which are related to alternatives in main-stream society. These areas range from the very esoteric such as numerology, tarot, etc. through various alternatives to health and diet, variations to the philosophical aspects of society, such as yoga, meditation and eastern religions. Then followed by alternatives to technology, psychology, education and self-awareness raising. It is in these areas that numerous workshops are held, to enable participants to find one or more pathways they might want to explore after the ConFest.



Secondly, we try to create a situation where people can be themselves without any mainstream forms of pressure on their behaviour. We hope that such an environment will be conducive to a fuller and more meaningful relating to others. By doing this, those who experience this may very well put that into practise into their daily lifestyle. Implicit in this is also an alternative way to relating to the younger members of society, i.e. children. At a ConFest we try relate to children as independent entities rather than — as is the norm — as relative nuisances which should be kept out of sight in nurseries or similar.



Thirdly, we try to create also an opportunity for people to enjoy themselves through expression of their musical and other creative talents. Till now we have been very successful in all three aspects.

The implication of all this is that the people who do organise a ConFest have the task of virtually creating a township with all facilities implicit in that. Water for drinking and ablutions, garbage collecting and disposal, food supply, electricity were necessary, first aid, fee collection, fire-prevention, entertainment and study/workshops, organisation and publicity, and public facilities from toilets to domes or marquees, traffic detailing and whatever a small township from anywhere between 5,000 to 15,000 people may need.

D.T.E.'s main task hasn't even begun yet.

We in D.T.E. do this because of our basic philosophy that we wish to change society as we know it now, into a society where people take precedence over materialism. This goal is possible but in order to reach it, we need to do a number of things. Firstly, we need to increase our awareness of ourselves and of our environment. Secondly, we need to learn to implement that newly found awareness.

The first objective is — to a large extent — already reached. Look at the great variety of 'alternatives' available, such as the classes by the Council of Adult Education, the very in-depth work of organisations such as Friends of the Earth and the Tasmanian Wilderness Society, the consciousness raising by the various Women's Awareness groups through to Yoga, Meditation, Tai Chi and numerous other classes and lifestyles presented nowadays as a matter of course. Gone are the days that, when talking about yoga, you would get a blank stare with a questions like "Joh, who?"

Because of this great variety of activities — unknown 15 to 20 years ago — people tend to think that D.T.E.'s role has been fulfilled, that it is *passé*, that it has done its job and is no longer radical.

I claim that D.T.E.'s main task hasn't even begun yet. I claim that D.T.E.'s main objective is so very radical that even most members in D.T.E. are seemingly scared of it because it means implementing that newly found and increased awareness into our daily lifestyle.

“... we are vulnerable like a chrysalis...”

We do implement this new, increased awareness firstly by a policy of non-participation and secondly by being supportive to each other. This policy of 'non-participation' means that we look at what we do and then try to find ways and means of not participating any longer in actions which perpetuate a destructive and de-humanising aspect of such an action. To elucidate this point: it is one thing to march in an anti-nuclear-war on a beautiful, sunny Saturday and then on the following Monday going back to work in an organisation which is geared to either nuclear proliferation or to furthering war in some form or other. Or, for instance, to get very hot under the collar about an aluminium smelter at Portland and then, when cooled off sufficiently, going to Target or some such store and buy aluminium pots or pans. Where do we draw the line between what we say and think and what we actually do either actively or by tacit and silent consent, to allow the opposites to our ideals to continue to happen?

“... devaluing and not acknowledging each other's creative efforts.”

We also have to learn to be supportive to each other and to create a situation which is supportive to one another. While we are going through our own format of change, we are vulnerable like a chrysalis. Those are the times when we need support, even if this form of support takes on the form of not hassling each other, not overtly or covertly demand conformity of each other. Only then do we feel safe to continue on our own paths of transformation. More importantly — we have to learn not to perpetuate the prime patriarchal behaviour pattern, i.e. devaluing and not acknowledging each other's creative efforts.



DO YOU FEEL THREATENED BY AN ORWELLIAN VISION OF 1984?
 COME AND CELEBRATE NEW YEAR'S EVE WITH LIKE-MINDED
 PEOPLE AT CONFEST 1984, A CONFERENCE-FESTIVAL
 THAT WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE!

We are facing the second depression of this century. 30% permanent UNEMPLOYMENT by 1990. This means wasted lives, hopelessness, despair.

Learn how to live in the cracks. You may never get a job, but you can still be productive. Come and learn new skills for SURVIVAL.

We are destroying our planet with POLLUTION. Cities are sinking into their own mire. The threat of NUCLEAR ANNIHILATION hangs over us.

Come and hear the leaders of the GREEN MOVEMENT. Voice your opinion on nuclear madness. We won in Tasmania there is still hope for the planet.

Nuclear families live in ISOLATION, sopping up false consumerist values from T.V. Personal liberties are eroded in an attempt to curb crime.

Learn how to take control of your own life. Come and listen to people who are living in harmony and mutual support on rural COMMUNITIES.

Our standards of NUTRITION and HEALTH are very low. We pollute our bodies and minds with stress, smoking and junk foods.

Learn new ways to care for your body and mind through massage, nutrition, herbal remedies, yoga. Improve your health through HAPPINESS and HOPE.

We are ALIENATED, distanced from each other. We have lost our networks, lost communication skills.

Learn how to NETWORK, how to meet others who share your interests. Gather and pass on information.

Entertainment has become big business. We have no say. Television is making us PASSIVE and APATHETIC.

Take the difficult path, grasp control of your life. Join in and enrich your life with MUSIC, DRAMA, POETRY.

The Confest is on a beautiful river-front site 18km outside Wangaratta, on the Ovens Highway. Bring camping gear and hot weather protection. Good, cheap food is available, also milk and vegies. Bring plates and cutlery. Help is needed for a few days before and after the actual dates.

DEFINITELY NO DOGS OR OTHER PETS.

PRE-PURCHASE NOW AND SAVE \$10!

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1984 CONFEST WANGARATTA

DEC 29

NEW YEAR

JAN 2



FOOD

(Faint, mostly illegible text at the bottom of the page, possibly containing event details or contact information.)



CRAFT MARKET

Anyone interested in having a stall at the D.T.E. ConFest Craft Market should contact:

Ren Bush,
P.O. BOX 83
Avoca, 3467

Looking for: natural cosmetics and Oils
Herbs and Plants
Handmade paper and cards
Clothes
Jewellery
General Crafts
ANY SUGGESTIONS?

The craft market is a service and entertainment and it should be attractive to both sellers and buyers.



FOOD

We are looking for a few people to sell food at the ConFest. If you know of anyone who may be interested — in supplying prepared vegetarian food — dry goods or fresh fruit and vegetables, please contact me:

Jean Grieve, telephone 861 6917 A/H
46 Hartington Street, Kew, 3101

Hey there! Could you come out of the woodwork, please!!!!

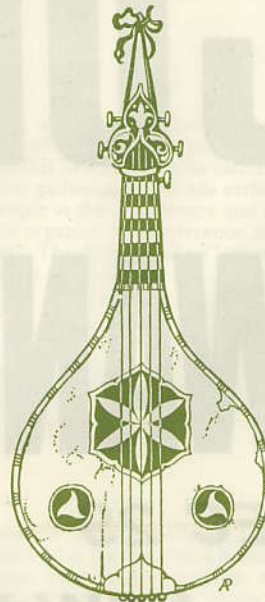
If the whole idea of a ConFest appeals to you and you would like to be involved in it, please contact us at the phone-numbers given for ticket buying. You really do not need to have 'previous experience' and — quite unusual nowadays — you are guaranteed a job!! There are still vacancies for:

SPARKS ** GATE CO-ORDINATOR ** A/V CO-ORDINATOR ** ADMIN CENTER CO-ORDINATOR ** MEMBERSHIP DRIVE CO-ORDINATOR ** ASSISTANT CO-ORDINATORS IN EVERY FIELD meaning that whatever you are interested in, you can be rest assured of being accepted with lots of warmth!

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