

SPRINGBOK STAMPEDE

by Contributing Editor Frank Collins

Youngsters—any age between 16 and 60—are travelling along the road to universal brotherhood. And making wonderful music . . .



Springbok Stampede . . . the full ensemble takes the stage for one of their swinging choral numbers. Uniform for the boys is blazer and grey flannels with neckties and the girls strike a colourful note with their dresses all the same cut but differently coloured.

PERHAPS the farthest way-out most swinging entertainment touring South Africa right now is a road show called *Springbok Stampede* — a non-stop riot of song that's as refreshing as the shower that follows a sauna.

As a show *Springbok Stampede* is in its third year. It has toured Southern Africa from the Cape to the Copperbelt. Its cast puts on 104 performances a year — in town halls, schools, barracks and cinemas. Thousands and thousands of South Africans have seen the show; many of them have seen it several times. Their lp *Springbok Stampede* is a runaway best-seller.

Its cast consists of about 50 youngsters, whose

ages range between 15 and perhaps 25. And they do nothing but sing (backed by their own pop group of guitars and drums) for the duration of the show. The girls wear neatly-pressed dresses, uniform in style but gaily different in colour; the boys wear navy blazers and flannels.

As they sing, they swing.

And within two minutes of their curtain-up explosion of sound and song they've grabbed the hearts of everyone in their audience.

From that moment on they never let up. Moving with effortless ease from a full chorus number to a group of close harmonists, to a solo with choral backing and then back to full chorus

SPRINGBOK STAMPEDE

they run through the 30 or so numbers on the programme.

The secret of their undoubted appeal is perhaps the sincerity and honesty of the happiness that radiates from them. They sing beautifully — individually, in groups or all together. But it is the wholesomeness of the youngsters that really grips you.

In an era in which the word “youth” has come to be almost synonymous with delinquency — here is a bunch of youngsters, if ever there was, to explode that fallacy. They’re clean. They’re fresh. They’re decent. They’re a bunch of kids who are really living right: that’s what you feel as you thrill to the joyous gaiety of their singing.

That, at least, was the impression I had of *Springbok Stampede* . . .

But *Springbok Stampede*, I discovered, is more than just a swinging, way-out road show.

It’s the manifestation of a way of life, a creed, a set of beliefs that these kids have — a code by which they live their lives.

In essence they believe that all the world’s troubles, its wars and confrontations, its pestilences and famines, would disappear if people would learn to understand and to live with other people. People are good. People are fine; if they’d learn to like and to respect one another. All people, that is.

Furthermore, these beliefs are not confined to a bunch of youngsters who live in South Africa. They are shared by similar young people all over the world — in America, in Europe, in Australia. It’s not a new religion. It’s not a political party. It’s not a sect. Anybody can join — by simply subscribing to the beliefs of the people who are known as *Springbok Stampede*.

This I discovered when I visited some of the leaders of the movement at their headquarters on the farm “Wag ’n Bietjie” about 15 miles north of Johannesburg. The farm is the home of Nico and Loel Ferreira, the husband-and-wife team who are directors of *Springbok Stampede*. At “Wag ’n Bietjie”, too, live about 20 of the permanent staff of *Stampede* — young men and women who plan and produce the road show’s frequently-changed programmes and who arrange the publicity and attend to the correspondence and the financial affairs of the movement . . . without getting a cent in salary for their work.

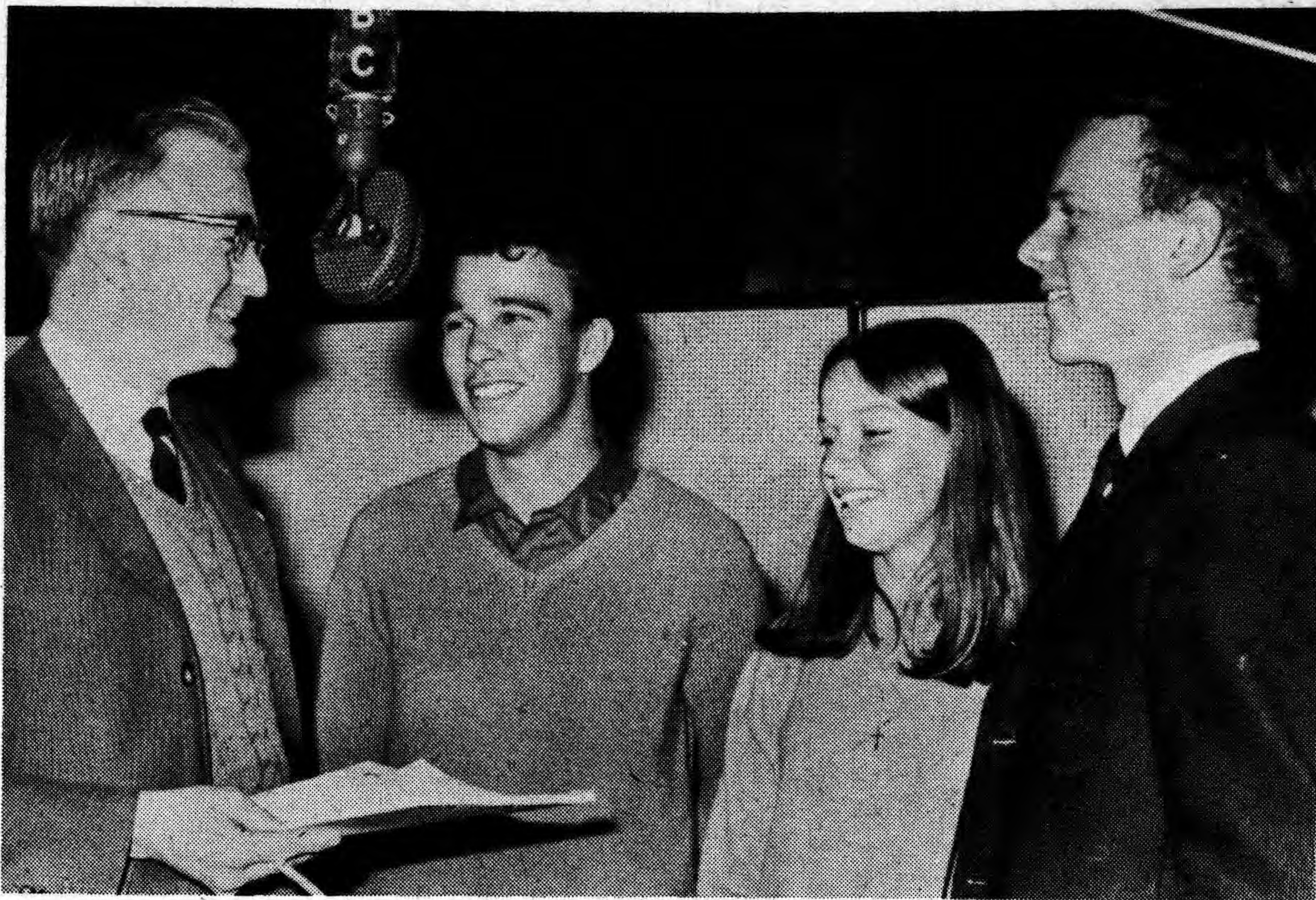
Off-stage they’re as friendly and likeable and as wholesome as they are when they’re behind the footlights, singing.

“Haven’t I heard that creed of yours somewhere before?” I asked their publicity manager, Anthony Duigan. “Basically, it’s the same creed as that of the Moral Rearmament people, isn’t it?”

“Sure,” he replied. “Moral Rearmament were the original sponsors of *Stampede*. It was they who got the show on the road if I’m allowed as corny a phrase as any in show business. But now we’re on our own though we still happen to believe in the same things that they do.”

Nico Ferreira, a political science graduate of Pretoria University, began *Springbok Stampede* in mid-1966. He and his attractive wife, Loel, had spent the previous two years working in different Central African states — all of them “emergent” or in the process of becoming so.

“In Africa,” said Nico, “we found countries and peoples that seemingly had everything — resources, potential and even overseas aid in the form of money. They had teachers, technicians, experts, as well as the labour force to ensure their peaceful and profitable development. Yet all the time we lived with war — or the threat of it. What was lacking was the spirit to forge ahead and we



A big moment in the history of Springbok Stampede was when they were featured in a live television programme in Rhodesia last year. Here three leaders of the movement are seen being interviewed by the programme announcer.

realised that the whole continent would crack unless this spirit could be infused — and fast.”

Back in South Africa Nico and Loel got together with friends, university students, lecturers, young professional men and women, industrialists — all of them people who thought in the same way the Ferreriras did. They spent many hours discussing the problem of Africa — hours and hours during which they got precisely nowhere.

“At the time,” said Nico, “I remembered the *Sing-Out* movement that had started about a year earlier in America. From its inception, *Sing-Out* clicked with American youth. Within a year there was not just one *Sing-Out* show touring the United States — there were ten and more of them. Soon the American leaders of the movement were being invited to countries in Europe, to Australia, to the Pacific and the Far East to explain their ideals. Here in South Africa we’re still working with choruses of fifty and sixty; in Italy, where exactly

the same show as we produce is called *Viva la Gente* the cast is a hundred and fifty and more — and there are seven shows, all alike, touring Italy alone. In every country they give them different names — but the shows are basically similar — folk stuff and country stuff written by the people — and for the people.”

This could be the answer, Nico mused . . . using the medium of song and music to get the message across to the youth who will be leaders of their countries tomorrow. He began to sound out his friends and rapidly found not only agreement but surprising enthusiasm.

Out of that enthusiasm *Springbok Stampede* was born in the winter of 1966.

Anthony Duigan, spokesman for the movement, is a comparative newcomer out at “Wag ’n Bietjie”. If new, he is by no means junior — there is no room for seniority either by age or by length of service with these people.

Like everybody else on the staff Anthony is

One of the lilting, happy songs on the Springbok Stampede programme is belted out by this happy-looking septette in which a bass and two guitarists sustain both rhythm and melody for the harmony of the singers.



SPRINGBOK STAMPEDE

unpaid. A former student of philosophy and theology — four years at universities in Ireland and Italy — he returned to South Africa to become a journalist in Johannesburg until, fired by the movement's ideals, he joined *Stampede's* headquarters on the Ferreiras' farm. He introduced me to a few of the others.

"Meet Jeanette, our commercial artist," went his quick-fire patter. "And Marietha, three-times-a-day cook for the whole bang shoot of us. This is William; he's editor of our regular Work Report" — (a newsy news-letter sent regularly to groups of youngsters who have been inspired by some previous *Stampede* show and who remain faithful to its ideals) — "and here's Chris and his wife, Milly — Chris is our financial director, by the way. Over there is Ian Hutton — our rhythm guitarist. Funny thing about Ian — he's fifty per cent blind. Got to hear of us while he was at Prinshof — that's the school for the partially blind, the only one of its kind in the country, in Pretoria . . ."

Ian left school before his matric exams were due, joined *Stampede*, learned a new purpose in life and has since passed his examinations — by correspondence. Nine others have done what Ian did — left school to join *Stampede*; they're all pupils in the mobile *Stampede* school and are swotting for their matrics by mail, with older Stampeders as tutors. But all at H.Q. are like that — former professional men, artists, students, artisans, scholars, — who now work full-time for "the show".

Their expenses are steep; they will need something like R30,000 this year to keep their show rolling at more than 100 venues between Rhodesia and Roggebaai in the Cape. Income? Derived from sale of tickets to the *Stampede* show and sales, at the show, of their two lp records both of which were cut "live" at various shows.

Otherwise — donations arrive.

One time Chris was really up against things in his capacity as financial manager. *Stampede* needed a coach to keep the show moving — and hadn't a cent in the kitty for the R4,000 vehicle or even for the R1,250 deposit the dealer wanted.

"That day," recalled Chris, "a woman we know came out to Wag 'n Bietjie and wrote us a cheque, quite unsolicited, for R1,000. An hour later a businessman in Johannesburg phoned to offer us a donation of R250 — equally unsolicited. Miracle? Call it what you like. Miracles have happened, you know. But God will — and does — provide. Don't ask me how it works — it just does, that's all I know! We needed R1,250 — and in two hits we had precisely that sum to deposit!"

"Because of your beliefs in the goodness of people across the colour line, don't you sometimes fall foul of government policy?" I asked.

"Look," said Anthony. "We're absolutely non-political. Thousands of Stampeders have English names, Afrikaans names; worship in synagogues, in Afrikaans churches or in Catholic cathedrals. Put it this way — *verkrampes* can hardly tolerate the mention of us — but *verligtes* are often right behind our ideals."

The brotherhood of these boys and girls extends far beyond the borders of patriotism. They are, I was reminded, not political — not United Party supporters, Republicans, Fascists, Nats, Progs, Liberals, Tories or even Communists; nor are they a religion (not Muslim, Christian, Jew nor Buddhist); nor are they a sect.

They're just youth — kids any age between about 16 and 60. Any creed. Any colour in the world.

And just this — whatever results they'll achieve along their road to universal brotherhood — they certainly make good music. Together, too. \$\$