

COLIN PRATLEY

Colin Pratley is a white man with the rhythm of a black man pumping through his veins. His drums are his life and his life is drums.

From Springs, he bought a kit, bashed them for endless hours and finally joined the Navarones 12 years ago. The Leeman followed, another step in the coming of the legendary Freedom's Children — one of the first, and arguably the greatest, hard rock bands to emerge in the heady days of the late Sixties.

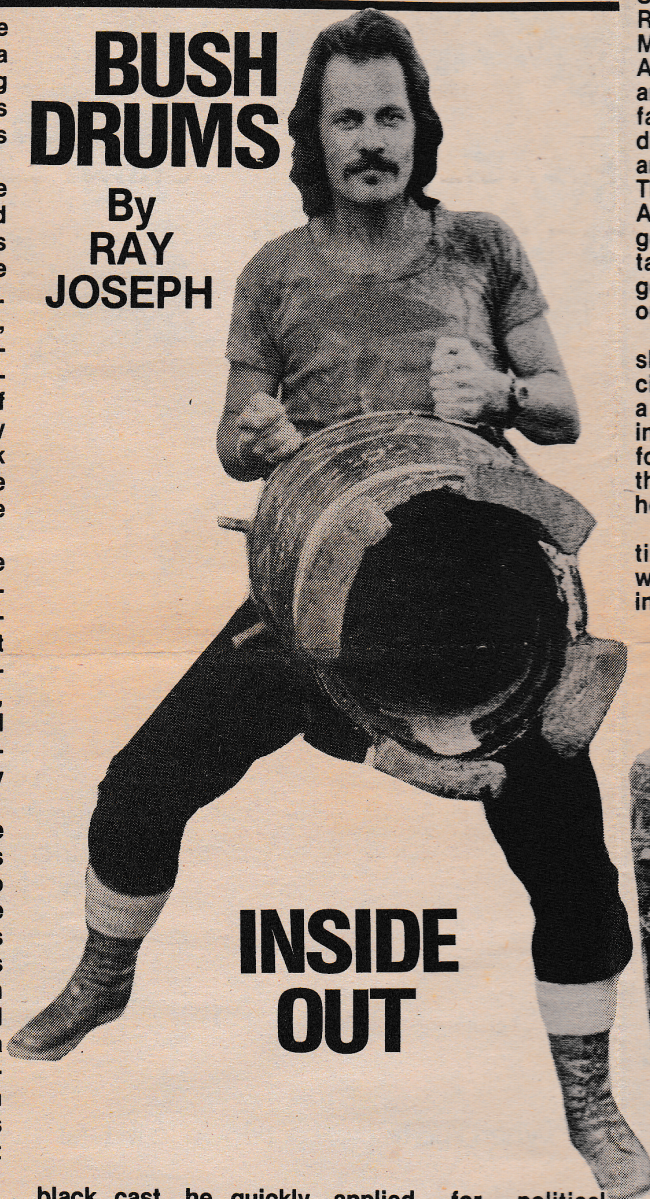
With Freedom's came one of the tightest, no-nonsense rhythm sections this country has yet produced — burly bearded, Greek god incarnate, Ramsay Mackay and Colin, rocking and rolling their merry way along.

But it was a mere five years ago, over 10 years since Colin first laid into a velum, that he says he first came of age. It was when he first tried his hand at the African drums. Tried them, liked them. He still uses a standard kit for the occasional gig and session work. It's when he's behind his African kit that he feels happiest: "Using your hands feels more natural. You get a better feeling hitting your hands against skin than using sticks on plastic," he said.

Colin's ability on African drums earned him a place in the cast of "Lulu Wena — the Two Faces of Africa", during its ill-fated tour of Canada last year. The only white cat in the all

BUSH DRUMS

By RAY JOSEPH



INSIDE OUT

black cast, he quickly proved he could hold his own with the blackest and best.

Soon after their arrival in Toronto they found things weren't going to be quite what they had expected. The show, plagued by anti-apartheid, went from bad to worse. The crunch came after their month booking ended, several members of the cast

applied for political asylum. Without waiting to see what happened, Colin decided it was time to get out.

Back home he landed himself and his African drums a couple of cabaret spots across the border, where he earned himself the affectionate nickname of "Bra" — (brother), Colin.

His Yeoville flat mirrors his love for

Africa — and more particularly, its drums. In every room, except the kitchen and bathroom, stand drums. Big ones. Small ones. From Rhodesia, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa. His pride and joy are a pair of drums fashioned from oil drums, given to him by an Ogies witchdoctor. These were his first African drums and he gets nostalgic as he talks and knocks out a gentle beat abstractly on them.

Often, when work is slow and life in the big city too fast, Colin loads a couple of his drums into his car and heads for the hills. It is from these trips, he says, that he gains his inspiration.

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"It's amazing how the time of day influences what I play when I'm out in the bush. In the eve-

ning I play real laid back beats. In the morning it's a slow build-up without too much aggression. But in the heat of the day, when the afternoon sun is blazing down mean and hot, I play flat out. Boom, boom, boom....

"To play these drums you've got to feel what you're doing. I mean really feel. If you don't believe that you can never become really good". And his home shows what he means. Besides the drums all over, all sorts of pieces of Africa decorate the place. The Zulu shield. One from Central Africa. A big timpani hangs on the wall. A warrior's

grass skirt. All other odds and ends that smack of Mother Continent.

Colin's drumming is versatile and changeable as his moods. He relived the hard rock of his earlier Freedom's days last year when he teamed with Ramsay, Brian Finch and Kenny Henson to blow Pretoria's mind with some heavy "bush" rock. The rock from the other three, the "bush" from Colins' African drums. He's the African beat on Paul Clingman's 'Father To The Child' and 'Inside Outlines' and more recently Kenny Henson's masterpiece 'Harambee'.

But it's also got it's hassles. Like being a specialised field and hard to get gigs. And, says Colin, there's a limited number of musicians who can work electric rock with African sounds.

In the end it's a case of being "spiritually into these drums if you wanna play them good. You gotta have the spiritual approach or you just don't connect to the power".



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