

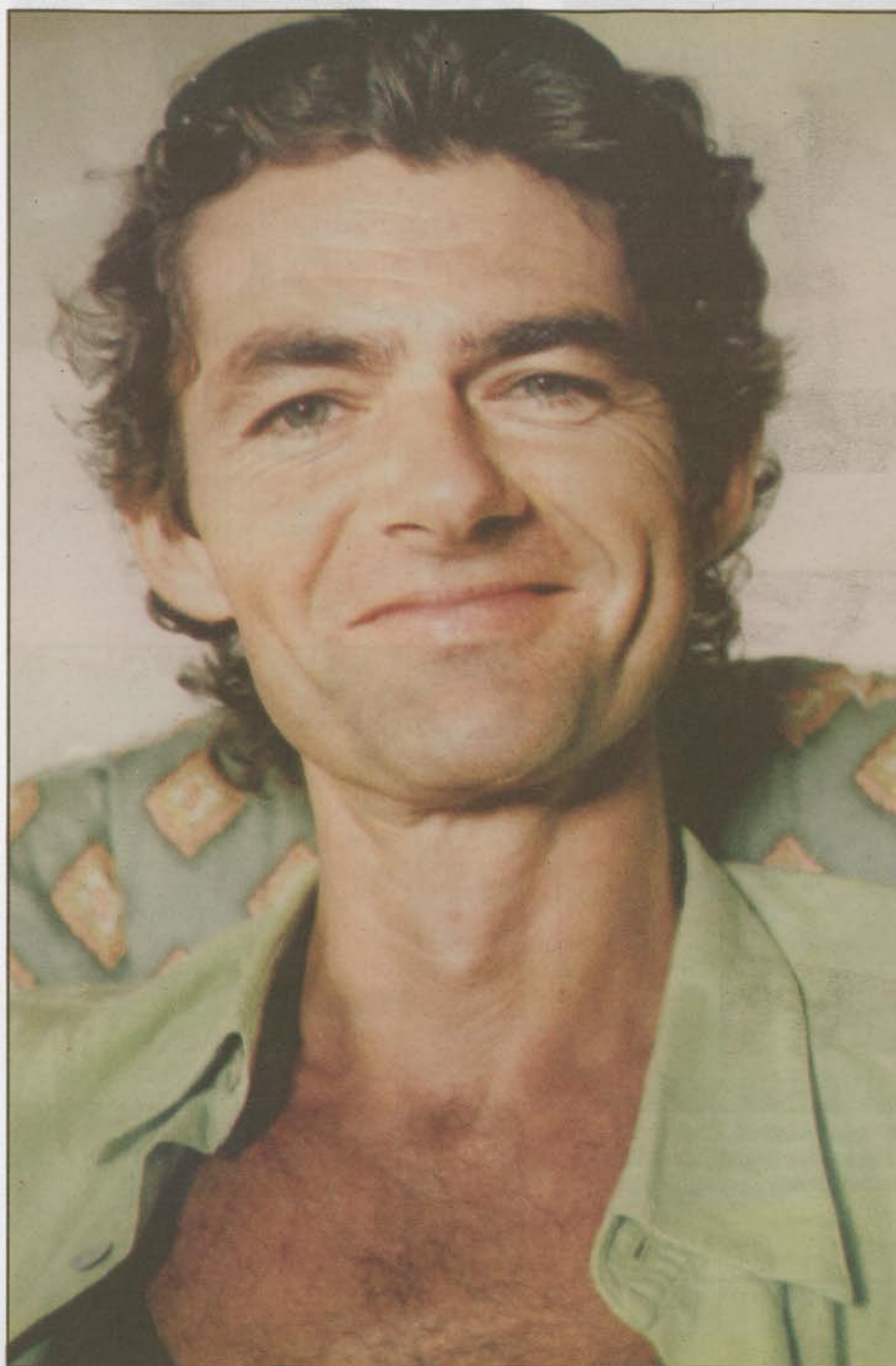
Not messin' around

Swiss drummer Andy Brugger has been in Durban to conduct workshops and perform with a number of local groups. Gisele Turner spent some time with this versatile and committed musician.

THE stage is holy ground," says Brugger in a mild enough tone, but with a gleam of fervour in his deep blue eyes. "When you get on the stage it means you have something to say. Otherwise, it's better if you stay in your chair and have another beer."

So speaks a man who has devoted himself to music, creating it, recording it, teaching it and, of course, playing it. More than 20 years ago he started playing drums and his CV reveals a continuous search for new ways of expressing his commitment to his chosen field of endeavour. He is eager to assist young musicians in finding themselves through their art and their art through themselves.

"I am interested in honesty. If I hear a musician playing honestly then I meet that person. I don't meet that person if he is pretending to be someone else!" Brugger comments that it is important for the musician to find himself, his identity, his own voice. "Sure. When you interpret a theme creatively it becomes your statement, your speech. So when



you bring your experiences, your problems, your preoccupations to your work and use the music as a channel you find a unique way to express yourself."

He shifts in his chair, leans forward and speaks intently. "You need a technique, a vocabulary, a language to show who you are. Everybody needs to learn that. But what you say in that language indicates your individuality, your originality – or conversely indicates the lack of those things."

How to get young musicians, who may be insecure or uncertain of their identity to reach that essential place of personal expression?

"WHEN I GIVE A CLASS I TRY SOME STUFF TO jolt the musicians into some new places. I want to make them unable to play what they are used to: that's the moment that something can happen. Students who are afraid of the dangerous process of exposing themselves look for places to hide, like behind their musical scores. Jazz notation was never meant to be a safe place to hide, but rather a launching pad for personal interpretation and improvisation."

Brugger continues by explaining what he looks for when playing with other musicians. "I'm not looking for harmony. I'm looking for learning through contrasting my statement with someone else's statement. Good music needs tension. And I want to be changed by the music that I play."

"Those moments of transformation that I search for are admittedly rare, but it's important to keep searching for them."

Brugger moves from his personal philosophy to his take on jazz generally. "Jazz has always been a bastard, different parents from different species, an alien. Jazz musicians shouldn't be afraid to get in touch with folk, classical, indigenous and dance music. Especially dance music. The function of jazz has been taken by hip-hop, funk, the dance floor cultures for the youth. It's important for jazz to incorporate new trends – I don't believe in the long life of a music that is not involved in the living process."

Come listen to Brugger in collaboration with DJ Toine Schultz, tabla player Vishen Kenraj, saxophonist Shaun Duval and recorder player Ben Turner this evening at the NU Jazz Centre's Happy Hour from 5.15pm – and be prepared to shift your brain into another gear. Entrance R5, cash bar available.