Bob Burns
Drummer in the original Lynyrd Skynyrd line-up

Bob Burns's powerful drumming provided the backbeat to classic songs such as 'Free Bird' and 'Sweet Home Alabama', which, with the band's style that in the 1970s came to be known as 'southern rock'. Burns was a founder member and key player during Lynyrd Skynyrd's most successful era, which came to a tragic end when the band's plane ran out of fuel and crashed in a Mississippi forest in 1977, killing the lead singer Ronnie Van Zant, the guitarist Steve Gaines and his sister and backing singer Cassie Gaines. Burns escaped the fatal accident, having suffered a different kind of crash of his own: he had left the plane in the morning of 1973, as the result of a breakdown, having become 'overwhelmed by life on the road'.

Lynyrd Skynyrd were noted hellraisers and the rock'n'roll lifestyle did not do Burns any favours, leading to a hospital admission, the result of bipolar disorder. But he remained part of the group's extended family and reunited to perform with other surviving members when Lynyrd Skynyrd were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2006.

Asked to recall his favourite story of life on the road, he cited a bizarre ride in a limousine with his fellow drummer Keith Moon when Lynyrd Skynyrd were touring America with the Who in 1973. Moon had obtained a blow-up doll, dressed it provocatively and waved it out of the car window.

Robert Louis Burns was born in 1950 in Jacksonville, Florida, and met his future wife, Marsha, when they were teenagers. They married in 1976 and had three children (she predeceased him in 2011). He was inspired to start playing the drums when he saw the Beatles on The Ed Sullivan Show in 1964. The following year he bought a set of stolen drums ('I knew they were stolen but I made sure I got a receipt'), he recalled, and formed a band called Me, You and Him, with the guitarist Gary Rossington and the bass player Larry Junstrom, rehearsing in his parents' garage.

When Van Zant knocked on the door and asked if the group needed a singer, Burns initially thought he had come looking for a fight. "I was a good, notorious fighter, like a bounty hunter," he recalled. With the addition of Van Zant and Allen Collins, the band became the Noble Five.

By 1968 the line-up had expanded further and the following year they were christened Lynyrd Skynyrd, a distortion of the name of a school gym coach. Burns claimed credit: "We were thinking of names for the band and I started laughing my ass off and said 'Leonard Skinner'... Where?" And I said, 'No, for the name of the band' and they busted out laughing."

Bob Burns, drummer, was born on November 24, 1950. He died in a car accident on April 3, 2015, aged 64