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Roach constructs winning set

By **BOB YOUNG**

Even before the first note was played by Max Roach's *So What Brass 5* last night at the Regattabar, you just knew it was going to be a very different kind of show.

Instead of the usual battery of mike stands and piano, there was Roach and his drum kit in the middle with a quintet of accompanists fanned out on chairs on either side of him facing the audience.

An understated introductory drum solo followed by orchestral unison playing and subtle shades of swing reminded the full house that the legendary drummer has gone far beyond his boot roots over the last five decades.

Roach is jazz's reigning percussion master of sound. His first set was testament to just how much of

Max Roach and the So What Brass 5 at the Regattabar, Cambridge, last night; through Saturday.

a master he is.

The lengthy opener, "Ghost Dance," moved intricately from small drama to small drama, with each of the brass fivesome taking turns matching wits with Roach.

Trumpeter Rod McGaha took off first, producing a slow, lanky feature that was followed by Antonio Underwood's nicely framed tuba turn, a hotter trombone piece by Delfeayo Marsalis, a full-bodied and patient French horn feature from Mark Taylor and, Eddie Henderson's tart, sharp-edged trumpet improvisations.

All the while Roach the sonic explorer kept changing colors, tempos and moods to both prod and travel alongside his soloists. It was a demanding piece that re-

warded precision and delicacy, and each player was up to the challenge of splashing their ideas against Roach's swiftly moving, multi-hued canvas.

Tuba player Underwood took over the spotlight on a brief but riveting rendition of "God Bless the Child," with Eddie Henderson's muted trumpet and Roach's brush-on-cymbal inserts adding to its quiet beauty.

Roach then unleashed a charged, yet economical attack on the racing "Donna Lee," with Marsalis in particular hurtling through an entertaining and witty solo that did the bebop classic justice.

Without piano and bass, the leader took advantage of the space to fill the role he loves to play: melodic architect constructing diverse textures and dynamics that were relentlessly original and appropriate.



CATCH ROACH: Max Roach performs at the Regattabar.