

Concert review

Max Roach

*The Jazz Bakery, Culver City
Through Sunday*

By Tony Gleske

Looking ever so sublime and distinguished, the great Max Roach, 74, stroked his cymbals and fanned his snares in an austere yet supportive way as the youngsters in his So What Brass Quintet strutted their highly personalized stuff on either side of him.

He began this gourmet musical feast with the main course, his own work titled "Ghost Dance." It

proved to be a lengthy but easily graspable piece in which Christmas-y brass ensemble passages alternated with solos introducing each of the five brassmen.

Roach interspersed subdued but witty comments from time to time like the host of a faculty party, and the rhythm migrated from an unwaltzy three-quarter time to a flowing samba-like beat. There was no bass or piano, yet so masterly was Roach's rhythmic output that you never missed them.

Perhaps the members of the

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quintet lacked the polish we are used to here in soundtrack Vienna, but they made up for it in New York sizzle. Tubist Antonio Underwood, for example, kept crushing the fresh rose in his lapel as he brought bass brass pathos to "God Bless the Child," assisted by the stinging, muted trumpet of Eddie Henderson while Roach remained tacit.

And young trumpeter Rod McGaha, brilliant on the swiftly paced "Donna Lee," played so fast, he used up all the notes and had to quit after one chorus.

But that was OK, because trom-

bonist Deléayo Marsalis showed him how to sound speedy with many fewer notes, a teaching feat that greatly pleased Roach, who is a professor at the University of Massachusetts and looks every inch the part Marsalis, who lives in the Big Easy, showed here and on his feature, "These Foolish Things," how to array form and sound to yield delight. His closing cadenza on the ballad gave you a little musical truffle at the end of a rich, improvisational dish that could have come from Galatoire's.

Mark Taylor, using one of those circular things you and I call a French horn, was professorial in soloing on the amusing, polyphonic chart Roach wrote for "Straight

No Chaser." Henry James seemed to be Taylor's mentor, for his sentences were long and subtle.

But the most fully satisfactory solo of the night came from Henderson, whose "You Don't Know What Love Is" closed the set. A richly conceived introduction faked you out as to what you were going to hear, and when it got there, it was heavenly: vibrant, dense, and glowing, and with enough brassman's savvy to challenge Clifford Brown, Roach's old trumpet partner from the 1950s.

Marsalis handled the bridge for Henderson with his orchestral sensitivity, and the result brought an expression of serene contentment to the maestro's physiogno-

my. He taught us all a lesson about five brass players that twinned with his lesson about four string players in his double quartet a decade ago. What more could a professor ask? He already has a MacArthur Fellowship. □