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Drummer Max Roach brings on the brass at Jazz Alley

What we have at Jazz Alley this week in **Max Roach's So What Brass Quintet** is the potential for a wonderful group.

Of course, listening to "le Max" is always a delight, and the drummer's sidemen — particularly **Eddie Henderson** (trumpet), **Delfeayo Marsalis** (trombone) and the surprising **Tony Underwood** (tuba) — are marvelous. (The second trumpet player is **Rod McGaha** and the French horn is played by **Mark Taylor**.) But this is a group that needs some more arrangements, so it can take advantage of its nonconformist instrumentation — five brass and drums — and dazzle us a little more with texture, counterpoint and orchestration.

The group came together in 1991 at a celebration marking the passing of **Miles Davis**. "But this is our second performance," Roach explained, adding that the "So What" moniker came from Miles' famous habit of shrugging off criticisms with that phrase.

There was no temptation to shrug "so what" during the group's understated but always subtly swinging performance Tuesday. Henderson had some fun with the opener, "Ghost Dance," tossing off a quote from "It Ain't Necessarily So," then really took off on a clever arrangement of **John Coltrane's** "Giant Steps." Muted, Henderson played a short duet with the tuba, on "God Bless the Child," which showed Underwood's true tone and articulate technique to good advantage.

The most interesting arrangement of the evening, a texturally active tune in 6/4 time, featured a solo by Marsalis with a strong dramatic build and some lovely cymbal orchestration. Roach's cross-rhythms on the following, up-tempo tune were a joy to hear — light, controlled, swinging, with every stroke in place.

There was a line outside in the cold for the second set, so if you're

up for some tasty, minimalist chamber brass solos with one of the greatest drummers in the history of jazz, get there early.

- You never know who's going to turn up at the Sunday jam session at Tula's. A couple of weekends ago, regular bassist **Michael Bisio** looked up and saw **Wynton Marsalis** standing in front of him, asking to sit in. Marsalis graced the crowd with a solo on "Bessie's Blues," among other tunes.

- "Soundsation," the annual festival presented by the renowned vocal jazz program at Edmonds Community College, has some marvelous guest artists. **New York Voices**, the 9-year-old jazz vocal quartet, appears March 6 at 7:30 p.m.; at 7:30 p.m. March 7, ex-Count Basie vocalist **Carmen Bradford** takes the spotlight, with Seattle's **Roadside Attraction**.

On its most recent album, **New York Voices** makes a refreshing departure from jazz, presenting an original, freewheeling arrangement of songs by **Paul Simon** — a timely excursion, considering the recent premiere of Simon's musical "Cape-man" (even if it was a flop!). With shimmering vocal harmonies that recall the **Beach Boys** more than the **Hi-Lo's**, this is just the kind of fresh material and forward-thinking that jazz vocalizing sorely needs. (Tickets: 425-640-1004).

- Saxophonist **Kim Richmond** and trumpeter **Clay Jenkins** visit Cornish College for a free master class from 4 to 6 p.m. Tuesday, then perform with faculty members **Dave Peck**, **Chuck Deardorf** and **Mark Ivester**, at 8 p.m. Wednesday. Richmond and Jenkins also play with the **Garfield High School Jazz Ensemble** at Garfield High, at 7 p.m. next Thursday.

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