

The Kitchen Spring Gala Honors Max Roach (In Memoriam)



Max Roach in DJ Spy, Fab 5 Freddy, and Max Roach, *Estate Fresh*, 1983. Performance view, November 11-12, 1983, The Kitchen (59 Wooster Street). Photo ©1983 Paula Court. Image courtesy of Paula Court.

This May, **The Kitchen** will pay tribute to esteemed experimental jazz musician **Max Roach** (1924–2007) during its annual Spring Gala on May 22, alongside visionary patrons **Bernard I. Lumpkin** and **Carmine D. Boccuzzi** and multidisciplinary artist and filmmaker **Lynn Hershman Leeson**.

Roach's legacy as a drummer and composer is grounded in his advancement, co-creation and fusion of existing genres and instrumental techniques throughout his prolific career, spanning five decades.

In the 1940s and 50s, Roach—alongside his contemporaries **Charlie Parker** and **Dizzy Gillespie**—pioneered the jazz style of Bebop. Playing on the forefront of the jazz avant-garde, Roach used his position to innovate the fast tempo Bebop is known for, and to draw attention to Black experiences in the United States during the Civil Rights Movement. Through his 1960 album *We Insist!* Roach's music became a powerful platform for Black liberation. His compositions reflected his deep social consciousness, intertwining his sound with a resolute commitment to justice and equality.

In 1970, one year before The Kitchen formed as an artist collective, Roach founded the percussionist ensemble **M'Boom**, creating innovative abstract musical compositions that reimagined soundscapes. Through the next decade, Roach would go on to perform with and score alternative, genre bending musical compositions for films, plays, and dance groups, before his first performance at The Kitchen in 1983.

Roach's first appearance at The Kitchen was for the program *Estate Fresh*, a collaboration between himself, **Fab 5 Freddy**, and **DJ Spy**. During the performance, as Fab 5 Freddy rapped and breakdancers took to the stage, Max Roach improvised drum solos, combining elements of jazz with hip-hop, a fusion of genres that was not popularized until the 1990s. One year later in 1984, Roach returned to The Kitchen to participate in the Downtown/Uptown Television Festival, presenting work by independent television producers and video artists.

For over 50 years, The Kitchen continues to be a site where experimental practices like Max Roach's are celebrated. With 2024 marking the centennial year of his birth, The Kitchen commemorates Max Roach both as a brilliant musician, educator and a champion of social change. Throughout his career, Max Roach has received numerous awards. In 1989, he was honored with the Commander of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in France. He was twice awarded the French Grand Prix du Disque and in 2008, he was honored with the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award by the Recording Academy. It is with great pleasure that The Kitchen will recognize his achievements this May at the Spring Gala—the organization's largest event of the year, celebrating art world luminaries who are beacons of their communities.

The 2024 Spring Gala will take place on May 22, 2024, at Guastavino's in New York. Ticketing information is available [here](#).



Photo by Francis Wolff, 1956.

About Max Roach

Max Roach (1924-2007) stands as a trailblazing percussionist, composer and pioneer in the development of contemporary American music. Born in New Land, North Carolina, Roach's exceptional talent on the drums emerged in his teenage years as he played with renowned orchestras like Duke Ellington and Count Basie. His journey led him to Brooklyn, New York, where he not only excelled academically but also became a key figure in the BeBop movement.

Roach's impact on the evolution of music is immeasurable. As one of the most versatile and inventive percussionists of the modern jazz era, he played alongside stylistic leaders, contributing to the definition of the sound known as bop. Introducing rhythmic innovations, Roach was among the first to establish a fixed pulse on the ride cymbal instead of the bass drum.

His musical journey reached historic milestones as a member of Charlie Parker's bebop quintet from 1947 to 1949. Later, he led a quintet with American trumpeter Clifford Brown (1954-1956), a collaboration that came to exemplify the aggressive style of jazz known as hard bop. In 1970, Roach showcased his global perspective by forming M' Boom Re: Percussion, a ten-member ensemble representing diverse percussion traditions from around the world. His commitment to showcasing the richness of global rhythm mirrored his broader mission as a cultural ambassador.

Beyond the stage, Roach's influence extended to lecture halls worldwide, where he passionately lectured on African-American music. His captivating presence resonated in concert halls, on college campuses and at major music festivals in the United States and Europe.

Roach's artistic expression knew no bounds as he composed works for soloists, chorus, orchestra, theater, dance, television and film. His versatility was further evidenced by his studies at the Manhattan School of Music and his co-founding of Debut Records with Charles Mingus, producing influential albums like "Jazz at Massey Hall."

A staunch advocate for civil rights, Roach's social consciousness permeated his music, particularly evident in the powerful "We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite." Despite facing obstacles due to his activism, Roach expanded his musical horizons, working with legendary musicians like Miles Davis, Stan Getz and Bud Powell.

Throughout his illustrious career, Roach mentored numerous musicians, leaving a lasting legacy in music education. Recognitions such as inductions into Jazz at Lincoln Center's Nesuhi Ertegun Jazz Hall of Fame and a MacArthur Grant in 1988 underscored his profound contributions.

Roach's music was inseparable from his message of justice and equality, positioning him not only as a master musician but also as a champion of social change. As the music community celebrated his centennial in 2024, Max Roach's enduring influence continued to reverberate, inspiring generations of musicians to embrace innovation, activism, and the transformative power of music.

About The Kitchen

Founded in 1971 as an artist-driven collective, The Kitchen today reaffirms and expands upon its originating vision as a dynamic cultural institution that centers artists, prioritizes people, and puts process first. Programming in a kunsthalle model that brings together live performances, exhibition-making, and public programming under one roof, The Kitchen empowers its audiences and communities to think creatively and radically about what it means to shape a multivalent and sustainable future in art. The Kitchen seeks to cultivate and hold space for wild thought, risky play and innovative and experimental making,

encouraging artists and cultural workers alike to defy boundaries and sending them into the world to remake art history and catalyze creative change.

Among the artists who have presented significant work at The Kitchen are Muhal Richard Abrams, Laurie Anderson, ANOHNI, Robert Ashley, Charles Atlas, Kevin Beasley, Beastie Boys, Gretchen Bender, Dara Birnbaum, Anthony Braxton, John Cage, Lucinda Childs, Julius Eastman, Philip Glass, Leslie Hewitt, Darius James, Joan Jonas, Bill T. Jones, Devin Kenny, Simone Leigh, Ralph Lemon, George Lewis, Robert Longo, Robert Mapplethorpe, Sarah Michelson, Tere O'Connor, Okwui Okpokwasili, Nam June Paik, Charlemagne Palestine, Sondra Perry, Vernon Reid, Arthur Russell, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Spiegel, Talking Heads, Greg Tate, Cecil Taylor, Urban Bush Women, Danh Võ, Lawrence Weiner, Anicka Yi and many more.