Maxwell Lemuel Roach was born on January 10, 1924, in Newland, North Carolina. As one of the key figures in the development of modern jazz, Roach was in the first group to play bebop on 52nd Street in New York, led by Dizzy Gillespie from 1943 to 1944, and he later worked with Charlie Parker’s finest group from 1947 to 1948. In 1954 he joined the brilliant young trumpeter Clifford Brown as coleader of the Clifford Brown-Max Roach Quintet. After Brown's untimely death in a car crash, Roach began to lead his own groups of various sizes and instrumentation (including interesting work with solo and choral voices, an all-percussion band, and a jazz quartet combined with a string quartet). His many compositions include *We Insist! Freedom Now*. This suite, written with singer Abbey Lincoln (who was his wife at the time), was one of the first jazz works with a strong and direct political and social thrust.

A phenomenally gifted musician with a matchless percussion technique, Roach developed the drum solo to new heights of structural refinement; he has been an influence on every drummer to come along since the 1940s. Beginning in 1972 Roach was a professor of music at the University of Massachusetts; in 1988 he became the first jazz artist to receive a MacArthur Fellowship—the most prestigious (and lucrative) award in the world of arts and letters. Roach continued as a professor until the mid-1990s while taking on various musical projects. One such project was *To the Max*, which contained a variety of his techniques, concertos for drum solos, and other works. He traveled with his quartet into the twenty-first century. Roach died on August 16, 2007.