

# JAM

**Jazz Ambassador Magazine**

**September 1997**

Steve Million

## **Thanks a Million**

*Palmetto PM 2026*

One of the paradigm elements of quality musicianship is often the element of surprise. ...Great improvisers have it. Listen to Stan Getz, and just when you think you know where he is going with a line, he goes someplace else. And delightfully so. ...Great performers have it. Glenn Gould's recordings of Bach are still, after all these years, often astonishing. ...And great composers have it. By their use of melody and/or harmony and/or form, they take the listener to places unusual and, often, remarkable.

The compositions of Steve Million, one of Kansas City's favorite sons, are consistently of this nature. They are rarely predictable, and are often surprising in what they do, where they go, and what they offer to both the soloist and, more importantly, the listener.

Million's second album, *Thanks A Million*, is a dandy. As with his first, *Million To One*, it is a fine display of the wares of a fully developed composer, and one who has the ability within many styles and formats to take his band and his listeners to very interesting places.

It is noteworthy that this new CD features the same band as the first: Million on piano, Randy Brecker on trumpet/flugelhorn, Chris Potter on tenor/soprano sax, Michael Moore on bass, and Ron Vincent on drums. Often, when a relative unknown like Million hires musicians of this stature for a first CD, they are somehow unavailable for future work. But Million's music is such that all involved are happily back, and the results are worth many a good listen.

All compositions are Million's, except for the title track by Gus Kahn. They are a far more eclectic mix of works than was heard on the previous release, running the gamut from samba through bossa nova to swing and featuring a myriad of tempos and meters. Steve explores three, seven and nine beats to the bar, as well as the more traditional four. There is not a weak tune on the album, with "Toe/Knee" — a fresh-sounding blues with wife Toni in mind — as the longest (at over seven minutes) and best of the bunch.

Vincent and Moore are again remarkable here. The feel and excitement they bring make for a force throughout, and one is always disappointed that their solos are not longer.

The same can be said of Chris Potter. He consistently provides solos of clarity and power, while

demonstrating once again that he is an artist of great magnitude. Randy Brecker, on the other hand, is not as consistent as the others. While he brings some very good playing to several of the tracks, he also is guilty of some thoughtless valve rattling. And the album is flawed by some technical glitches from the horn players as well as some intonation problems between Brecker's flugel and Potter's soprano. The "uncomfortable" line is crossed at times.

Million's piano work is always adequate, though at times a bit hurried and shallow. However, his solo on "Mis'ry Waltz" is as well constructed and fun as any of his compositions. And on the aforementioned "Toe/Knee," he simply roars, proving conclusively that he can play with the best.

*Thanks A Million* is the second in what is hoped will be a long string of compositional successes for Steve Million. He is a mature and important writer, and he will be at the forefront of jazz composition for a long time to come.

— John Leisenring