

# 52nd Street Jazz

CD Review by Jeff Morris

## Steve Million: "Truth Is..."

Palmetto 1999 64

Musicians: Randy Brecker, trumpet & flugelhorn; Dick Oatts, tenor & soprano saxophones; Steve Million, piano; Steve Cardenas, guitar\*; Michael Moore, bass; Ron Vincent, drums.

Tracks: Right Place, Wrong Key\*; Truth Is. . .\*; Terror of Toni Town; Fireflies\*; All the Things You Are; Perfectly Spaced\*; Shytown; Eiderdown; Nomadrigal\*; Blackwater\*; Ain't That Familiar\*; Gallop's Gallop.

Rating: \*\*\*\*

This is the first album pianist Steve Million has recorded for Palmetto that hasn't as its title used some pun on the leader's surname. There's rhyme to this reasoning--TRUTH IS. . . is, and I'll swear to this, as clear and uncluttered a statement a musician can make. Out the window: silly hooks. In your lap: a flawless modernization of Bud Powell, not unlike Million's contemporary David Kikoski in virtuosity, melodic awareness and pulse.

Take "Terror of Toni Town," where Million blocks out a corral for cohorts Brecker and Oatts. Or, for that matter, "All the Things You Are," which, nowadays, has become the hallmark for those who simply don't know what else to play, but in Million's hands sounds like a mi--well, a lot of bucks.

Dimmer switch please. We'll start with the generally superfluous guitar of Steve Cardenas. The only place it fits is when the group is at its least interesting, on "Fireflies," "Blackwater" and so on. And though the disc is programmed well, with things like Steve Swallow's "Eiderdown" in place of the usual no-brainer standards, TRUTH IS. . . hits a bright canter that's rarely interrupted and ultimately exhausting. By the time it's "Ain't That Familiar"'s turn, its irrepressible funkiness just isn't very welcome.

But twin suns shine brightest--Dick Oatts drags the title cut out into a slo-o-w meditation on soul that's an appealing departure from trumpeter Randy Brecker's alertness and Million disappears under the horizon with a brief and astute solo reading of Monk's little-played "Gallop's Gallop."