

After years of playing in bands that inevitably fell apart, as bands so often do, keyboard player Delvon Lamarr landed in a different kind of group: one founded by his wife and manager, Amy Novo. She created the Delvon Lamarr Organ Trio so her husband could fully focus on the things he does best: writing and playing music.

With a deep soul backbone augmented by jazz, rhythm & blues and rock 'n' roll, the Seattle trio — Lamarr on B-3 organ, Jimmy James on guitar and David McGraw on drums — evokes a classic instrumental sound with a fresh, virtuosic sensibility all its own on debut LP *Close But No Cigar*. The band put out the album independently in 2016, and Colemine Records gives it a wide release in March.

All three musicians knew each other from the local soul scene. When Novo founded the Delvon Lamarr Organ Trio in 2015, Lamarr asked McGraw if he was interested in joining the band. After playing for a year with another guitarist in the group, Lamarr invited James to sit in as a substitute one night at the trio's regular Tuesday gig, and he never left. That's when the band truly found its sound. "We had chemistry right out of the gate, and that doesn't always happen," Lamarr says.

In fact, the keyboardist and guitarist say they're constantly engaged in a game of name-that-tune, throwing in licks from obscure soul or rhythm & blues tunes and seeing where the other takes it, while McGraw sits back in the pocket and keeps things moving. "It puts you on the edge of your seat, like, I don't know what's going to happen here," James says. "It's like going out into the middle of the forest with nothing, and there's bears and wolves all around, and seeing if you can make it out."

Their chemistry stems from each musician's unique abilities. James describes McGraw as having "that rare soul sound. He's got this light touch, but it still tells you, 'I'm here.' You feel it." Meanwhile, Lamarr holds down basslines on the organ that are so vivid that audience members sometimes ask where the bass player is. "His left hand is second to none," James says. "He's got that, but he's also got this wild approach. He goes for it, and he's fearless about it."

Though James is more modest about his own abilities — "I mostly just go for what I feel," he says — his bandmates complete the picture. "When Jimmy joined the band, everybody who was a regular at that club said, 'That's it: that's the band right there,'" Lamarr says.

Lineup thus complete, the Delvon Lamarr Organ Trio spent those Tuesday night sets honing its sound, often creating songs onstage in the middle of gigs. "It gave us a lot of freedom to explore," says McGraw, who also plays with James in the local soul band the True Loves. "So much of the songwriting, and our ability to improv together, came from those live shows."

The Delvon Lamarr Organ Trio recorded *Close But No Cigar* soon after James joined the band. "Those originals came together pretty quickly, and we were still kind of learning them when we went in to record the record," McGraw says. While Novo handles the business end of the group (and others that Lamarr plays in), the musicians have logged countless hours onstage together, resulting in a trio that's tighter than ever. In addition to the tunes on *Close But No Cigar*, they have a stockpile of new material they're looking forward to taking on the road and, by the end of the year, recording for a second album.

“It means a lot to me that people dig what we do,” Lamarr says. “I just want people to feel it, basically. So far, it seems to be going pretty well.”

###