**Westside Cowboy bio**

You can’t plan for everything. Reuben Haycocks, Paddy Murphy and Aoife Anson-O’Connell didn’t have anything specific in mind when Jimmy Bradbury asked them if they fancied starting a band called Westside Cowboy during his shift at a music shop. Yet a couple of years, a clutch of singles, a killer live reputation and a record deal from Island Records imprint Adventure Recordings later, it seems like the idea’s got legs: whether they meant to or not, Westside Cowboy have become one of the most exciting new acts in the UK.

At the time of that initial conversation, the four members of Westside Cowboy were all living in Manchester and taking things as they came. Reuben (guitar, vocals), Paddy (drums) and Aofie (bass, vocals) were all studying music, while Jimmy (guitar, vocals) was working at the shop (Johnny Roadhouse) after graduating from a similar course a little earlier. Aoife, Reuben and Paddy all met during freshers’ week; the latter two quickly started an experimental project called DieKaiDai, and all three played in various groups together. Aoife had come from a classical background, studying cello and playing chamber music, but was quickly won over to indie and pop once she arrived in Manchester from her hometown of Coventry (her classical training made playing “five notes and having a shout”, as she self-deprecatingly puts it, seem like a walk in the park). Jimmy, meanwhile, had played with Paddy in an earlier project, surf-punk band Katz, and had been bowled over by his technique and energy after he jumped in at the last minute when their former drummer dropped out of a show.

It wasn’t always easy though. The reality of balancing university, shop work and complex, “techy” music (as they put it today) was starting to make all four ambitious, talented young musicians prematurely jaded. Luckily, their new band came along at just the right time.

The kernel of the new band began to form in Jimmy’s mind as he worked in the shop and found himself reading Billy Bragg’s *Roots, Radicals and Rockers*, the folk artist’s book on the history of skiffle. “It’s sort of the first UK DIY scene,” he enthuses. “It’s the UK in 1954, and people hear Elvis and all of a sudden every kid in the country wants to learn how to play guitar. But there weren’t many instruments, so people would get a washboard, or a tea chest bass – a double bass made out of a wooden crate and a broomstick handle, with a piece of string to make a drone – and just give it a try. I really liked all that. And we at least had guitars – let’s try and do something.”

It turned out that all four Cowboys found something inspiring in this early phase of rock’n’roll and skiffle, as well as more recent work that drew upon a similar spirit – The Felice Brothers’ ‘Frankie’s Gun’, for instance, became a shared favourite. Soon enough, they got themselves into a room and started learning a few covers, but after a couple of sessions, a flurry of their own Westside Cowboy songs burst out all at once. The frantic ‘Alright Alright Alright’ took shape first; within two weeks, they’d written and arranged all five songs from what would become their debut EP, *This Better Be Something Great.* Looking back, Reuben puts this down to a “lot of pent-up energy – it was a very creative time for us.” Paddy agrees, and describes their “180” from the “weird music” that was burning them out, back towards “more traditional stuff” as something organic and refreshing. “We slammed our heads against the wall for so long trying to make something that was different,” Reuben recalls, “We’d been making songs that felt like Sudoku puzzles. It was so freeing to say, ‘Let’s just see how far we can get before we have to think about anything.’ If a song is good, at its essence, nothing else really matters.”

There’s an impulsive joy to the tracks that emerged from those early sessions: lean, country-tinged indie-pop songs with insistent hooks and almost familial sense of artistic connection. All members of Westside Cowboy studied music to degree level, so there’s plenty of technique on display in their work, but it’s never overthought or flashy; these are songs that breathe and surge like living creatures, set newly loose. Semi-seriously, they call it ‘Britainicana’, trying to capture their potent blend of classic British songwriting (The La’s, Lonnie Donegan, John Lennon) and widescreen American alternative rock (Pavement, The Replacements, Pixies). It’s a label that’s beginning to catch on.

Echoing their teenaged skiffle forebears, the Cowboys’ first show was put on by a mate in a coffee shop in central Manchester, reflecting a DIY ethos that’s stuck with them: to this day, they hand-print their merch and artwork, keeping the core of the fast-rising project feeling as personal as it was at the beginning. After a couple more early gigs, the buzz got going in earnest. Demos found their way into music industry circles across the UK, and interest from managers, labels and booking agents flooded in quickly. The unassuming band members still seem pleasantly surprised by this – “those demos were on private links!” – but not necessarily out of a lack of (justified) self-belief. Paddy remembers the moment that the band really clicked during that early two-week rush. “We wrote ‘I Never Met Anyone I Thought I Could Really Love (Until I Met You)’ in one of those afternoons,” he says, referring to the band’s overwhelming debut single. “We were just messing around and then without even talking about it we were basically playing it like we still do now. I was biking back to my girlfriend’s house afterwards and I kept having to pull over to listen back to the voice note we made. I was like, ‘What the fuck?’”

The feeling that they just might be onto something as Westside Cowboy led the naturally spontaneous group to think carefully about where they wanted the project to go. Well, sort of carefully.

“As a joke in the pub, we wrote a list of all the things that we wanted to achieve in the year of 2024 or whatever it was,” says Reuben. “We were like, ‘We want to do ten gigs, we want to release a song, we want to play [legendary Manchester venue] The Ritz… and we want to do a world tour with Bruce Springsteen. We actually, by chance, did everything but the Bruce Springsteen tour. But, you know, things are in the works…”

By chance or not, soon enough they signed up for a co-release on tastemaker labels Nice Swan and Heist or Hit. ‘I Never Met Anyone…’ came first as a single in November 2024, with ‘Shells’, ‘Drunk Surfer’ and ‘Alright Alright Alright’ following up quickly ahead of the full release of *This Better Be Something Great* in August 2025. They made the EP with Lewis Whiting from Mercury Prize winners (and fellow Nice Swan alumni) English Teacher at his studio in Leeds, his crisp production capturing the band’s exhilarating performances with just the right amount of polish and no more. The release soundtracked a hectic summer for Westside Cowboy, kickstarted by a rapturous reception at Brighton’s Great Escape festival and their announcement as winners of the Glastonbury Emerging Talent competition. Their sets at both events were among the most-talked about at each, and support tours with the likes of Blondshell, Black Country, New Road, Ezra Furman and more have kept the momentum going. They’ve had to adapt to the touring routine pretty rapidly, but now have a pretty firm grasp on how to keep themselves healthy and perfect the art of life on the road. The band, all vegetarians and vegans, are even taking a camping stove with them on their next run to cook their own meals. “I can’t face eating more hummus for a good while – I’ve eaten, like, a *ridiculous* amount,” says Reuben, visibly shuddering.

Somehow amidst all this, they still found the time to help form No Band Is An Island, alongside fellow indie bands Holly Head, Pushbike and Martial Arts. It’s an initiative that places political action back into the heart of the indie scene, not only raising funds for good causes, but seeking to build an ecosystem of artists who can organise and work collectively to make a real difference in the music industry and beyond.

“I found out a lot about the music industry through this band,” says Aoife. “There are a lot of wrong things, bad attitudes and self-indulgence. What I really loved about joining the band in the first place was making all these really nice friends and being able to go down the street in Manchester and bump into someone. We’re all quite politically conscious, and it can feel a bit helpless sometimes, because you’re just playing music, and especially in Cowboys, the lyrics themselves aren’t political. We’re not trying to make statements in the music itself, but we all feel really strongly about this stuff. So No Band Is An Island was a way to tie all things together, highlight this community and see how we can use it in a positive way.”

“There’s so much happening in the world that is just outright evil,” says Paddy, “And we’re forced to sort of just get on with it because the corporations we work for or that we give all our money to are complicit. I’m talking about the genocide, obviously. And it makes you ask why you’re playing music: like, I should be a paramedic, or working for charity or something. The world often feels like everyone just thinks there’s no point anyway – in the grand scheme of things, what can we even do? But No Band Is An Island is against that nihilist way of thinking. There’s always something that can be done, and this is something we can do.”

“In the future we’re going to try and make it a collective,” adds Reuben, “where if you play in No Band Is An Island, you then take No Band Is An Island t-shirts to sell at your gigs – we pay for them, then they add them to the merch desk, and we build up an ethos of collective accountability, with a code of conduct and a sense of working together to make stuff happen.”

Next up is perhaps the biggest step yet for Westside Cowboy: their signing to Island Records imprint Adventure Recordings. Their first release on the major label will be the single ‘Don’t Throw Rocks’, perhaps their most cathartic track yet, all barely-contained excitement and gleeful release; next up is ‘Can’t See’, a kinetic college-rock sprint that’s as immediate as anything they’ve ever released. Their second EP will follow early in 2026, overseen by Loren Humphrey, known for his production, engineering and instrumental work with everyone from Arctic Monkeys to Cameron Winter. “He’s been a crazy new influence on us,” enthuses Paddy. “He’s helped lead us through certain things that we just didn’t really know about, suggesting cool things and pushing us in a lot of different places.”

In two short years, Westside Cowboy have come a very long way. Yet even if they’ve already exceeded their own expectations, they’re not tempted to rest on their laurels. Although understated and humble, this is a group driven by a desire to connect as widely as possible. They’re aiming to break out of the obsessive muso bubble, not necessarily for the sake of huge commercial success, but in order to get past the fragile elitism that haunts so many cliquey scenes and fast-changing trends.

“We want to make music for everyone and we don’t want it to feel like you can only like our band if you live in a cool city with a good record store, around the corner from a cool venue,” says Paddy. “Like, music that *actual people* can enjoy: our parents, our grandparents, young people too – we were all kids once, getting into music for the first time, and we wanna have something for everyone to enjoy. There’s no barrier to entry.” For a band who started without a plan, Westside Cowboy have very quickly worked out exactly who they are.