

Westside Cowboy

In an age of algorithms, Westside Cowboy are pure-spirited proof of the magic that can only come from human connection. Just three years on from forming in Manchester, starting a band for the fun of it without so much as a plan to even play a gig, the quartet - Jimmy Bradbury (vocals, guitar), Reuben Haycocks (vocals, guitar), Aoife Anson O'Connell (vocals, bass) and Paddy Murphy (drums) - have crafted perhaps the year's most exciting debut by simply figuring out what feels good, and following it into the horizon.

"There's no computer that could make It Goes On. No formula to creating the joyous whack of emotion that comes from these four mates pooling their ideas and watching them fly. "If you go in with a preconceived notion of what you're doing, it's sort of destined to fail because you're not truly being yourself," suggests Aoife. "So because we didn't think we were gonna [do any of this] at the beginning, all we were thinking was: 'What's going to be the most enjoyable thing to play right now?'"

Aoife, Reuben and Paddy all knew each other from the Royal Northern College of Music; Jimmy and Paddy had played in a band together a few years previously. When they decided to sit in a practice room as a quartet for the first time, there was only one rule for what would follow. "We just wanted to make simple music. I think the reason there was such chemistry - and when we look back, even after two weeks we were really working well together - is because it was such a simple statement of intent," recalls Reuben. "Any time we'd disagree on something - which was very rare - we'd just consult the original mission statement: if you've got too many chords in it, you're wrong."

A purposeful reaction against the "more abstract" styles they'd individually been dallying with before, Westside Cowboy swiftly became a place for concise, straight-hitting ideas influenced by "early rock'n'roll: Lonnie Donegan, The Beatles and The Velvet Underground," says Paddy. Jimmy remembers spending the bulk of 2023 playing the first five songs of an Elvis Presley album on repeat. "When we started the band, people would ask who was in it and we'd be like, 'We got this guy who works in a guitar shop, only

listens to Elvis and dresses like Marty McFly - you know, that guy!” Aoife laughs.

If these were the solid early seeds of Westside Cowboy, then the biggest thing that’s shaped them into the exploratory, melodically robust band they are now, has been their own journey. When they did start playing gigs (their first two shows were at a coffee shop, and for an animal rights charity), they found that their songs were being stretched and pushed forward in real time. Paddy notes that the true crux of *It Goes On*’s propulsive, heady opening track ‘Kick Stones (The Boys)’ is “as much about how we made it as the lyrics”.

“We loved the way it felt to play, but we thought we couldn’t record it like that or people would think we wanted to be a stadium rock band,” Aoife jokes. Instead, they translated it through their own lens, using a live recording of The Velvet Underground’s ‘What Goes On’ as their primary reference point. “We always thought, if we can pull this off it could be really fun,” Paddy grins. “Taking this mad, ‘70s rock thing but then having it played by a bunch of scrawny kids.”

Since those first shows, Westside Cowboy have found themselves notching up an increasingly wild list of live milestones. Last year, they won Glastonbury’s prestigious Emerging Talent Competition, leading them to an opening slot on the televised Woodsies Stage. Since then, they’ve toured with Black Country, New Road and Geese while, later this year, they’ll play their biggest headline gigs to date, including stop offs at London’s O2 Kentish Town Forum and Manchester’s Albert Hall. Winning the Glastonbury slot, says Reuben, felt like “the first moment that we realised we really were a band”. Now, with the making of *It Goes On*, Westside Cowboy have underlined exactly what kind of band they want to be.

Recorded with producer Loren Humphrey (Geese, Cameron Winter, Wunderhorse) at Greenmount Studios in Leeds over a period that saw them thinking on their feet and remodelling their production into an even more directly energetic new form, there’s an urgency of feeling to *It Goes On* that could only ever really happen with a young group’s debut record. “First albums are often my favourites because you can tell there’s a point to prove. You’re firing on all cylinders because you know that this may never happen again,”

says Paddy. "You're trying to create these big feelings, but all you have with you to string it together is a pencil and a Pritt stick."

Big feelings are at the heart of the matter: these are songs that aim to distill the confusion, desperation and blind hope of youth into eleven tracks that hit you in the chest. Westside Cowboy describe it as 'the yank'. "There's a major key, triumphant sound to some music - like the first Arcade Fire album, or 'Someone Great' by LCD Soundsystem - where there's a persistence that's contemporary and energetic, but also a simplicity," Paddy continues. "It's as though someone is shoving emotion into it in a way that feels like it's reverberating," Aoife nods.

The lyrics across Westside Cowboy's debut might often be up for interpretation, but the emotion that pours out of them is clear. On 'Well Done Kid, You Did It' they address the confusion of trying to make your way in a broken and terrifying world with the same cathartic forward motion of its central idea: that sometimes, all you can do is try your best. The rousing 'Pin Up Boys', explains Reuben, became "heavier and more aggro" every time they played it live; a mirror to its preoccupations with the struggles of self control. Meanwhile, though 'Worried Age' might wear its fears in its title, there's a sense of defiance and resistance to its steadily escalating sonic scale that feels like strength. By the track's raucous, screaming crescendo, the only answer is to come together and dance it out.

In a time of terrifying division and conflict, Westside Cowboy always try to focus on what unites us. Early on in the group's life, they co-created No Band Is An Island: a Manchester-based collective putting on fundraising nights to spotlight both local artists and important issues via speakers from charities and direct action groups. "I think we wanted to engage with politics in a way that felt more impactful beyond the music," notes Aoife. In their current video for 'Kick Stones (The Boys)', they called upon the skills of FC United: a splinter team that started when Man United were sold to an American corporation. "They're very community minded and they have a similar atmosphere to what we want to be," says Reuben. "Their ethos is 'making friends not millionaires'."

It Goes On ends with 'You Could Have Died There On The Dancefloor': a track that the

quartet purposefully wanted to leave as the record's parting note. It's a wide-eyed, open-hearted ellipsis that cuts to the core of everything that's come before; the final air punch in the name of hope. "The final lyric is 'I am everything but perfect / But I'm trying, so please keep me around,'" smiles Reuben. "And that's the spirit of Westside Cowboy."