

Words Trina John-Charles

WESTSIDE STORY

WSTRN

Art Director + Stylist Kiera Liberati | Photographer Vic Lentaigne



Akell wears *jacket* Element,
Top John Smedley, *Accessories* Artist's Own

Louis Rae wears *Jacket* Fila,
Top Cheap Monday, *Trousers* G Star Raw

Haile wears *Jacket* K100 X Karrimor,
Jumper G Star Raw, *Hat* WeSC

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Louis is the first to get changed and be seated for the interview. He's 25, he spent most of his life playing semi-professional football, which he then left to pursue music. All the girls love him – which I think he is more than aware of, but pretends not to be. Louis' personality isn't too dissimilar to his rap style: laid-back, cool, calm and collected.

Louis is then promptly joined by Haile (pronounced 'highly'). Haile is 20 and is sometimes referred to as the baby of the group – which he really doesn't like. He sings the catchy hook on the group's top 5 hit 'In2'. He's also visibly fatigued, hungry and doing an interview is probably the last thing he'd volunteer for right now. Haile looks as if the family pet has just died, which sounds dramatic, but is actually quite hilarious to watch. However, he remains polite, courteous and professional throughout.

Last to join us is Akelle. He's the fire cracker of the group – and the one most likely to be entertained by a box of them. He's always

playfully teasing someone, or causing some kind of chaos. You'd think someone like this would be annoying, but he's so much fun. (Just don't say he looks like his brother, the singer/songwriter Angel, or Snoop Dogg). Akelle is the double threat, rapper and singer, and the last one to arrive, as he was busy negotiating as many free clothes from the shoot as possible.

Louis, Haile and Akelle make up the West London collective – not boy band – WSTRN. The crew embody West London's turn to bring prominent urban acts – the area hasn't produced as much urban talent as South or East. With the huge crossover success of their single 'In2', which temporarily knocked Adele off the #1 spot and charted at #4, they're putting West London back on the map whilst slamming their catchy, credible brand hip-pop/RnB into the charts.

Recently signed to Atlantic Records, with over 2.5 million hits on YouTube in just three weeks and a top 5 single, some are sceptical about the validity of their super-organic, overnight success. 'Ask the streets if you want,' Louis says. 'They'll tell you there's nothing fake about us. They'll tell you there's nothing manufactured. That's why people show us so much attention and support us.' 'Yeah, it wouldn't work otherwise,' Akelle adds. 'People are supporting it, because they know it's genuine,' Haile concludes.

T-Shirt Fabric, Track Suit Fabric,
Hat Tiger of Sweden, Bandana Artist's own



Hair SHARON ROBINSON using Redken
Grooming SHELLEY BLAZE using Mae Cosmetics
Fashion Assistant KOJO HAMMOND



Jacket + Trousers G Star Raw,
Jumper Cottweiler



Jacket Nobis, Top Samsøe & Samsøe, Hat Kangol

We have a colourful chat covering a lot of topics, but somehow descend into a conversation about whether or not they have girlfriends, and if they'd be allowed to say so if they did. 'All my fans could be female though? If I say that, they will all... why would I say that?' Akelle exclaims, with a gesticulated pie chart for emphasis. Louis tactically removes himself from the discussion altogether: 'I don't have time for girls. I don't even have time to sleep.' Haile diplomatically adds: 'It's something she'd just have to understand...' 'Understand you're openly denying your relationship in public?' I ask. 'No, understand that it's just part of the job to say that.' Interesting...

'Obviously, there is more attention, but it hasn't changed me or how I go about my every day life,' Louis says. This is hardly a throwback to a 90's RnB video... Where are all the thongs and champagne? Akelle explains why they aren't so fussed. 'I'm not going to lie to you, there are girls that I've tried to message before and now it's just like, "OMG babe! I'm only just seeing this message now!" "What do you mean you're only seeing it now? Why didn't you open up your message before? (He laughs.) I messaged this girl like, three years ago... 2013 it was, look! Look at all this... Air, air, air, just blue, no silver!' Akelle scrolls through a series of failed conversation attempts with the young lady... 'Look! Air, air, air... then she writes: "Two years later and I've just seen this. LOL! Oh wow!" LOL, Oh wow, indeed!