

# Aaron Johnson as John Lennon is a Real ‘Nowhere Boy’

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- [Aaron Johnson](#) [2]
- [Anne-Marie Duff](#) [3]
- [Aunt Mimi](#) [4]
- [George Harrison](#) [5]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [6]
- [John Lennon](#) [7]
- [Julia](#) [8]
- [Kristin Scott Thomas](#) [9]
- [Liverpool](#) [10]
- [Movie Review](#) [11]
- [Nowhere Boy](#) [12]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [13]
- [Paul McCartney](#) [14]
- [The Beatles](#) [15]
- [Thomas Sangster](#) [16]

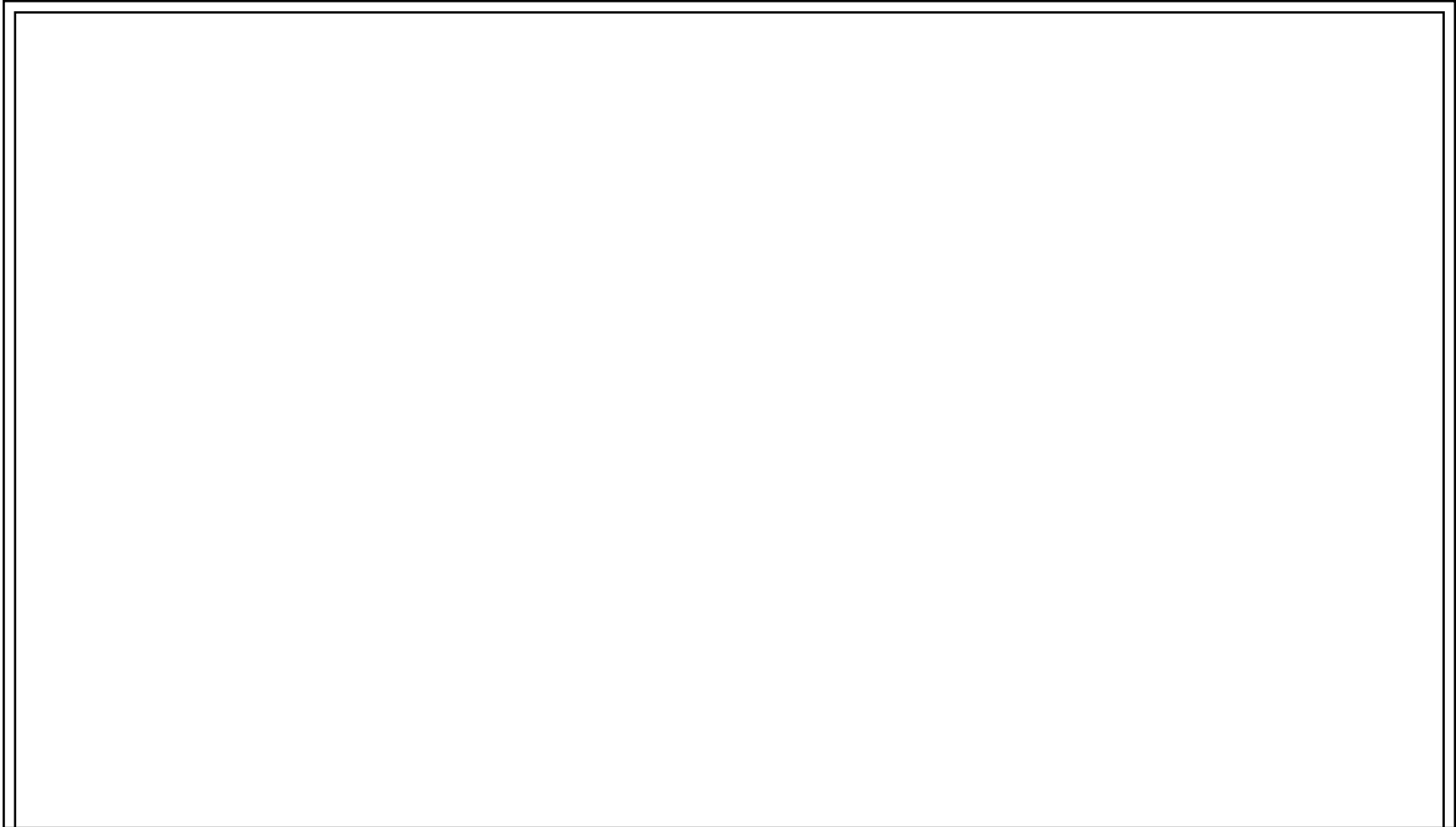


CHICAGO – The great John Lennon would have been 70 years old on October 9th, but never got to expand upon the journey that started in a small British port town called Liverpool, where a young Lennon was shuffled from home-to-home between his Aunt Mimi and his mother Julia. Aaron Johnson plays the teenage rock icon in a crucial point in his life in the poignant “Nowhere Boy.”

Aunt Mimi (Kristen Scott Thomas) is John’s guardian in the beginning of the film. Lennon is a restless boy as depicted by Aaron Johnson, having trouble conforming in school, and developing a taste for the new American craze of rock and roll. His mother Julia (Anne-Marie Duff), is attempting to reconnect to her young son, but Lennon is somewhat afraid of his red-haired, high spirited mater, and Aunt Mimi is not too keen on John getting back together with her ne’er do well sister.

It takes John’s cousin to bring him to Julia, who was then living with another man and two additional daughters. They come together virtually immediately, each feeding on each other’s spirit for adventure, including John’s love for rock and roll. It is Julia who picks up a banjo and teaches John the first major chords that will someday start a revolution. Mimi is perturbed to hear of the reunion of John and Julia, bringing back hard feelings of why she had to adopt John.

Meanwhile the restless Lennon is having school troubles again. He is suspended for a week, and escapes to Julia’s home to play out his time. Julia buys him his first guitar, and together they work on some of the Elvis tunes that John can get from some of the sailors at the Liverpool port. His destiny is assured when he gets some schoolmates together to form his first band, The Quarrymen. At a church party after their second show a slight, gawky teenager named Paul McCartney impresses John with his rendition of “20 Flight Rock,” and is asked to join the band.





The Lad Who Rocked the World: Aaron Johnson as John Lennon in 'Nowhere Boy'

*Photo Credit: © The Weinstein Company*

Nowhere Boy explores the circumstances of Lennon's relationships with Mimi and Julia, and the birth of The Beatles. The wee lad that nobody seemed to want would soon lead the most successful rock band in history and this film is the origin of the hunger that got him there.

This is a carefully and lovingly produced biography, pulling no punches when it comes to showcasing Lennon, warts and all. It starts out with a subtle nod to John's future, as he has a dream that he is running through his school, mirroring the beginning of the movie "A Hard Day's Night." His restless teenage soul is essentially captured by Aaron Johnson (who starred earlier in the year in "Kick-Ass") and the conflicts that John has to deal with predicts the future star who never seemed to settle within his own skin.

The supporting cast lends an authenticity and purpose to Lennon's journey. Kristen Scott Thomas channels the emotionless British mum part of John's Aunt Mimi – who famously said "The guitar's all very well, John, but you'll never make a living out of it" – and takes on the role of taskmaster, the guardian who tried to set up the very stability that Lennon was yearning to rock. Anne-Marie Duff as Julia is all full-of-life, and projects an Oedipal tone in her relationship with her son. That spirit masks the vulnerability of a woman who gave up her son, and Duff handles all emotions deftly.

John's schoolmates, so essential to his formation of his music life, are shown as a neutral zone that Lennon could escape to between his aunt and mother. Pete Shotton, Colin Hanton, Eric Griffiths and Rod Davis were The Quarrymen, and they were present when the young Paul came in and auditioned for the group. Thomas Sangster as McCartney gives a perfect performance as teenage Paul, bonding with Lennon because he had lost his mother Mary to cancer the year before. The origin of their relationship, that would play out many times twenty years afterward, is shown as restless teenage angst and hopefulness. It is a highlight of Nowhere Boy.

The birth of The Beatles (which are coyly never mentioned by name) is the energy of the second part of the story, as gigs begin to get larger and the rock that Lennon loves becomes a part of his life. The timing of all that is important to the events that happen next, including a vital piece of truth-telling regarding Lennon's boyhood, and the freedom that the truth allows has Mimi and her sister Julia coming to a understanding.





Influences: Anne-Marie Duff as Julia and Kristen Scott Thomas as Mimi in ‘Nowhere Boy’  
Photo Credit: © The Weinstein Company

Nowhere Boy is not perfect, but it certainly is eye-opening to anyone interested in how Lennon became who he was. It suffers by dragging at some points in the narrative, but as soon as the band kicks in, it’s the exuberance of a sound that was soon to echo throughout the world that fulfills this nowhere boy. The restless teen is poised to become the sound and fury of the Nowhere Man.

The spirit of John Lennon has become a shorthand for love and hope, given the contribution of his magnificent songs, combined with his short life and tragic nature of his death. Nowhere Boy is truly a “day in the life” of his inner being, on the edge of tomorrow never knows.

*“Nowhere Boy” continues a limited release in Chicago on October 15th, check local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Aaron Johnson, Kristin Scott Thomas, Anne-Marie Duff and Thomas Sangster. Screenplay by Matt Greenhaigh, directed by Sam Taylor-Wood. Rated “R”*



[17]

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- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/george-harrison>
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- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/nowhere-boy>
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