

Tuning into the past

Pictures: ANDREW FOX

Jane Clinton meets singers Richard and Adam who are performing at care homes and inspiring patients with dementia

THE MAN in the wheelchair looks frail and tired, as though he is ready to drop off to sleep. Then suddenly the music starts and he begins to stir. From his tiny body outbursts a huge voice and he begins to sing.

There are no lyrics, instead he is "ahh-ing" and "laa-ing" along to such favourites as Moon River and Unchained Melody, but there is strength and vigour in this voice. It is astonishing that such a powerful sound could come from him.

Clem, as he is affectionately known at the care home near Solihull where he lives, has limited spoken communication (a result of the ravages of dementia) but he loves to sing.

When the song is over he smiles broadly. "Wonderful!" he says.

Nearby a lady whispers: "My dad's crying."

She gestures over to her father who has Parkinson's. "He likes opera," she says wistfully.

The inspiration for Clem's impromptu singalong and the high emotion comes from the classical singing brothers, Richard and Adam Johnson, otherwise known as Richard & Adam, who are performing.

The duo from Holywell in north Wales came third on Britain's Got Talent in 2013 with their final performance marred by an egg-throwing incident. The former sandwich makers, however, have gone on to great success.

Their debut album *The Impossible Dream* topped the charts for four weeks making it the longest-running number one album of 2013. Their latest and third album *At The Movies*, which includes film songs such as *Can You Feel The Love Tonight* and *Goldfinger*, is out tomorrow.

As well as conventional touring, they have recently embarked on a mini tour with the help of Age UK to day centres across the UK, for a very personal reason.

When their grandmother June, who is 80 and has dementia and Parkinson's, lost her ability to converse fully they did what they knew best: they sang to her. The reaction astounded them.

"We found with Nan, when you are talking to her she sort of understands bits and pieces but when you start singing songs such as *Some Enchanted Evening*, which she associates with Grandad who died this year, or *Danny Boy*, she absolutely comes alive," explains Richard, 24, who is the chatterer of the two brothers. "She gets really excited and starts clapping. It's amazing."

Adam, 21, nods. "She tries to almost sing along," he says.

While they were aware that June



REASSURING: Welsh singers Richard and Adam Johnson have brought a great deal of pleasure to elderly suffering from debilitating memory loss



HELPING THE COMMUNITY: Working with Age UK, Richard and Adam met Alzheimer's sufferers in Dudley

loved their singing, it was also the reaction of her friends in the care home where she lives that convinced them they could offer something to other people.

Greg Duddy, chairman of Age UK, Solihull, is delighted by Richard and Adam's "four". With the help of Age UK they will go to a centre in Dudley. They will also perform at a centre in Coventry and will host a tea party for 100 guests. They have four more dates confirmed.

"Contact with young people like Richard and Adam at an event such as this is incredibly stimulating for older people," he says. "Music is a wonderful stimulation for memories and positive feelings and I would like to see music much more utilised with the older generation."

There have been many studies looking at the beneficial effects of music for people with dementia. Last

year in the US a four-month study saw how singing classic numbers from hit musicals, such as *The Sound Of Music*, could boost the wellbeing of people with Alzheimer's.

The Alzheimer's Society runs the Singing For The Brain service. There are also many other musical events taking place in care homes and day centres across the country.

PROFESSOR Paul Robertson who is a concert violinist and a co-founder of The Music Mind Spirit Trust, is an expert in the study of music and memory with a particular interest in dementia. "It can be very powerful because for a short time, while the music lasts, they are back with themselves, as it were, and are very present," he says.

"It is a beautiful thing to witness. It

is a miracle. Unfortunately we don't recognise most of our everyday miracles."

The ability to connect with music is one of the last things to leave us in a condition such as dementia. In his book *Musophilia*, neurologist Oliver Sacks recounts the story of a man called Woody who had Alzheimer's. He had forgotten most of the events of his life and could no longer even tie his tie, yet he could remember the baritone part of every song he had ever sung.

Professor Robertson has also seen such a transformation and recalls how a former church organist who had advanced dementia, had no language or recognition skills but had retained her musical talent.

"Someone started singing a hymn and this woman sat down at the piano, found the right key and accompanied the singer perfectly,"

recalls Robertson who has an honorary doctorate in medicine

Claire Garabedian, a cellist, is completing a PhD on the effects of music on people with dementia and on interaction with their carers at Stirling University.

SHE warns: "I have seen amazing turn-arounds in interactions between a person with dementia and a person who cares for them but some people with dementia can get irritated (as we all can) when hearing a piece of music that is familiar that they cannot correctly identify."

It is estimated that there are 800,000 people with dementia in the UK. This is predicted to rise to more than one million by 2021.

For Richard and Adam, they feel compelled to do whatever they can to raise awareness of the condition. As the concert draws to an end and the pair finish their final spine-tingling song, *This Is The Moment*, Clem musters all his might and shouts, "Well done! Well done! I loved it!" He smiles and begins to sing again, this time even louder than before.

● *At The Movies* is out tomorrow on Sony Music. Richard & Adam will tour the UK in early 2015. Age UK: ageuk.org.uk/0800 169 6565. The Alzheimer's Society (for information on dementia and Alzheimer's): alzheimers.org.uk/0300 222 1122. Parkinsons UK: parkinsons.org.uk/0808 800 0303.