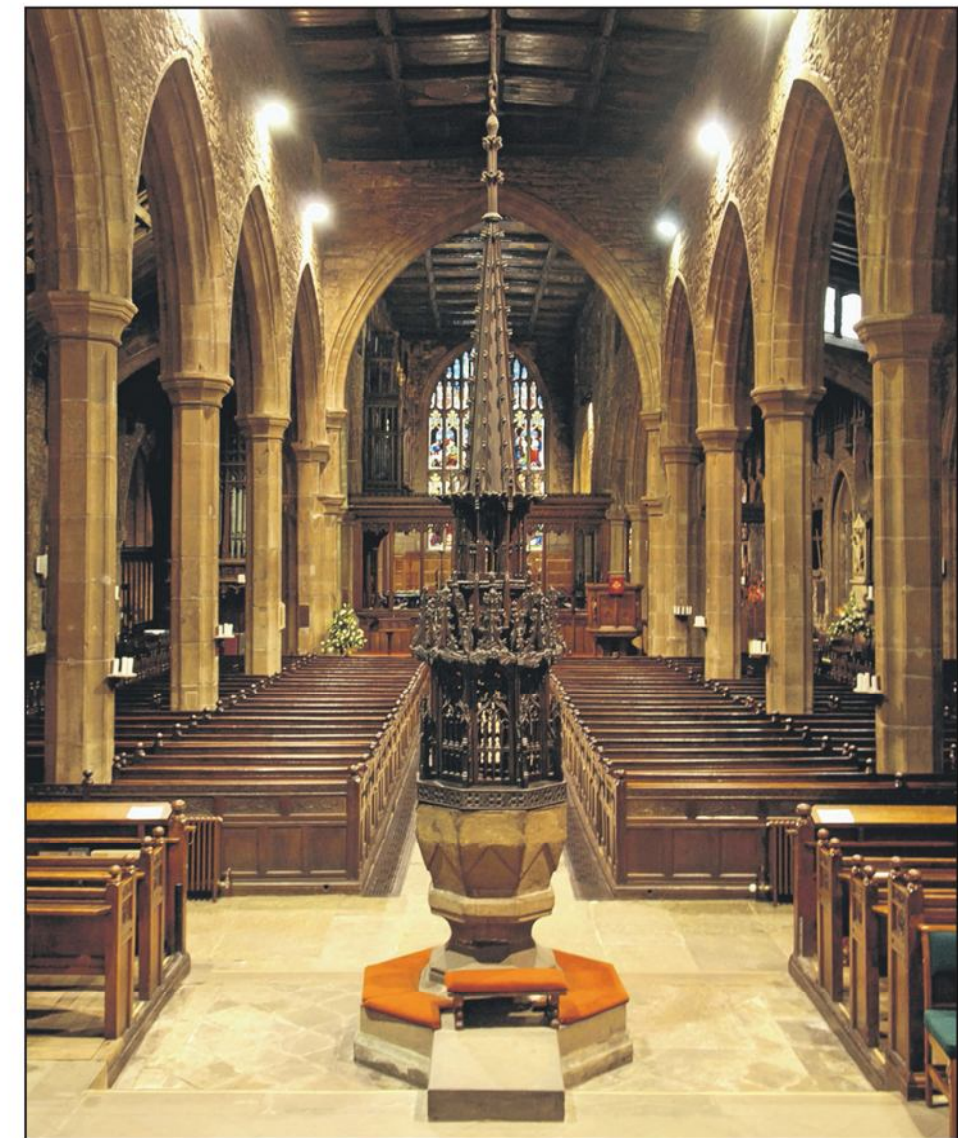


Inspired music, inspiring venue, inspirational conductor. Emily Heward meets Clarence Adoo as he prepares to conduct Black Dyke Band

Musician Clarence gets in tune again



Band leader: Black Dyke Band rehearse at Halifax Minster, with quadriplegic conductor Clarence Adoo



Great setting: Halifax Minster



Inspirational figure: Clarence Adoo

LYING in a hospital bed, Clarence Adoo didn't dare to dream he would ever take to the stage again as a musician.

Paralysed from the neck down after shattering a vertebra in a devastating car crash, even the simplest of tasks were now beyond the ability of the once talented trumpeter.

"It was like being paralysed in two dimensions, losing my physical ability and losing a form of expression," says the 50-year-old.

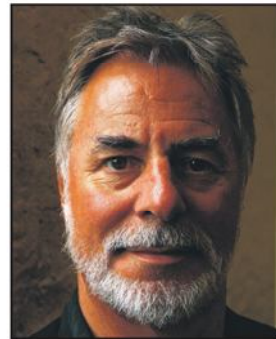
Yet 16 years on, his musical career is going from strength to strength and tonight he's in Halifax to conduct a performance of Queensbury's Black Dyke Band - using only his head.

It's something he never thought possible in the six months he spent in a hospital spinal unit, following the accident in 1995.

He had been driving down the A1 to his brother's stag party when his black BMW inexplicably veered off the road and flipped near Retford, Nottinghamshire.

He and his passenger, orchestra colleague Emma Forbes, both broke their necks - but while she went on to make a full recovery, Clarence was rendered quadriplegic.

"While I was in hospital they showed me a video of how someone can control



Reputation: Barrie Rutter

electrical things around their house, a person lying on the bed who used a whistle that controlled different things," he says.

"I thought I was shown this video because that's how my life was going to be - just in bed."

It would have been a stark contrast with the glittering career he enjoyed before his accident. Born in Ghana and raised by foster parents in Essex, Clarence began to learn the cornet aged six and went on to study the trumpet at the Royal College of Music in London. After graduating in 1986 he performed in and around London in orchestras, West End shows, jazz ensembles and pop groups before joining Newcastle's Northern

Sinfonia in 1991 - four years before the fateful crash.

Amazingly, it was music that saved him from a worse fate, as doctors believe his trumpet playing spared him a life on a ventilator.

"The consultant thought I would have need this for the rest of my life, when one day they thought the ventilator was misbehaving," says Clarence. "They changed it twice, then on the third one they realised it was me actually fighting the ventilator. They thought that because I was a brass player that it may have given me more strength than the average person."

"They disconnected me and I had a nurse by me for two hours. It was really a scary time for me because I was hoping that they were right - and lo and behold I've not touched a ventilator since."

Lumbered with a ventilator, he would almost certainly not be where he is today, travelling around the UK to conduct orchestras and bands, deliver presentations and give lectures.

It's a far cry from the sedentary existence he once imagined, and it's thanks in part to the hope his manager at the Northern Sinfonia gave him when he visited his bedside.

"He said as long as my brain wasn't affected, and my hearing, he wanted to

reemploy me in some form or other," says Clarence.

"That was a massive incentive to get out there and see what I could do, but I had no idea how or what was possible. It just slowly grew."

Since then he's conducted six orchestras in the North of England, directed a warm-up session of the National Youth Band of Great Britain and led a whole clutch of Salvation Army bands and university ensembles.

"I've done more variety of conducting since my accident," he says. "I used to direct and coach small groups from universities up there. They asked me to coach bigger and bigger groups until one day I had in front of me a full orchestra."

Without the use of his arms, playing a musical instrument again still seemed unlikely - but now he is doing just that with a specially-designed computerised instrument called Headspace.

Invented by German-born American composer Rolf Gehlhaar, Clarence controls it with his breath and head movements.

"I wear a headset so when I move my head it moves a mouse across a piano keyboard on screen, that can trigger different notes," says Clarence. "Then I wanted more input than just turning

notes on and off, and he gave me a facility to adjust the volume and attack of the notes, by moving my head in different directions. I had to totally relearn these skills and any time I'm playing I have to become very focussed."

Nevertheless, the opportunity has enabled him to get back on stage with colleagues he worked with before his accident, and, in his own words, "come to life" as a musician once more.

"Some of the massive joys and achievements I had before my accident have actually come to happen again. Now when I concentrate on playing this instrument I'm totally unaware of my disability."

Tonight's concert at Halifax Minster also features Barrie Rutter, founder and artistic director of Northern Broadbends, the touring theatre company based at Dean Clough, Halifax.

Barrie says: "I am absolutely thrilled to be provid-

ing Shakespeare's text as the Black Dyke brass band play William Walton's wonderful film music from Laurence Olivier's 1956 production of Richard III.

"We rehearsed on Monday and it was totally exhilarating to hear the text and an 'army' of the best brass band in the world at the same time. I am sure it will be a wonderful night of sound and words."

Black Dyke spokesman Mike Shenton says of Barrie's involvement in the performance: "Our reasoning is that Barrie Rutter is an actor with an international reputation, similar to the band, and who lives in Halifax. Too often in this world, geniuses are not recognised on their doorstep and we wanted to bring together local partnerships."

■ To give to the Clarence Adoo Trust, which helps fund his 24-hour care, visit www.clarence.org.uk



Earlier days: with trumpet