



Choir sings for crowds of fans at Fratton Park

IT was an amazing occasion as schoolchildren sang a brand new song in front of 19,000 fans at a Pompey football match.

The children delivered the world premiere of *The Pompey Chant* at half-time during Portsmouth's match against Ipswich Town. They stepped onto the turf at Fratton Park to perform in driving rain during the club's final home match before Christmas.

The children are all part of Choir Church, a brand new worshipping community that is being created around a children's choir, based at St James' Church in Milton. Fratton Park is within the parish of St James.

Members of Choir Church were invited to be part of the matchday entertainment by the charity Pompey in the Community. The 30 singers and their teachers were able to watch the Division 1 match from close to the pitch before and after their performance.

Musical director Alastair Ross conducted the choir, which includes pupils from Milton Park Primary

School and Meon Junior School, in singing two songs during the half-time break. Fans showed their appreciation with claps and cheers.

Crystal Griffiths, 11, from Meon Junior School, said: "It was a little bit nerve-wracking, but it was also exciting to sing in front of that many people. But I think we were focussed on what we were doing."

And headteacher Sara Paine said: "It was an amazing opportunity to sing in front of so many people. For many of them it's their first time even at a football match. I'm very proud of them, and proud that the rain didn't put them off, even though they got soaked."

Musical director Alastair Ross has spent the past few months recruiting children from local schools to create 'Choir Church'. The pupils rehearse regularly, and the idea is that their families ultimately form a new worshipping community.

Choir Church members have performed at the 75th anniversary of D-Day event in the summer, and at significant services at St James Church. And just a week before this

Above: Children from Choir Church sing on the pitch during Pompey's victory against Ipswich Town

event, they sang to a packed crowd in the Fratton End of the stadium as part of Pompey's official carol service.

The Pompey Chant was written by the founders of Out of the Ark Music, Mark and Helen Johnson, and is based on *The Portsmouth Song* and the *Pompey Chimes*. Members of Choir Church recorded the song for an EP earlier in December at Out of the Ark's studio.

Alastair said: "It was a wonderful experience hearing this song resounding around Fratton Park. Singing and chanting at matches is a real opportunity to express enthusiasm, emotion and support, and the choir instilled that enthusiasm around the stadium."

And Helen Johnson said: "We were able to bring together timeless songs and chants from the rich Pompey history, and create some original lyrics that will hopefully generate pride in the Portsmouth community and a spirit of excitement in singing."