

BROADCAST-American Idol finalist brings "Flowers" to OSF Children's Hospital of Illinois

A typically bubbly and self-described nerd who became an American Idol Season 20 top finalist, Leah Marlene says the song "Flowers" is something she wrote following some dark times. Marlene explained why she planned to sing it as she visited with sick babies and children at OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois in Peoria this week.

"Flowers is a song of hope, and so I just hope it comforts and brings hope to the kids and families in the hospital today, and I just really hope it makes them feel whatever it is they need to feel and that it is a light in their journey." (:17)

The 24 year-old native of Normal, Illinois now lives in Nashville, Tennessee, and she recently announced a new set of tour dates. She's writing and performing new music, and while at OSF Children's Hospital, Marlene explained she believes in the healing power of music, so it was an easy "yes" when hospital President Mike Wells reached out via Facebook Messenger about making a visit.

Marlene explains she and her family have never suffered a serious illness, so she wasn't familiar with the type of care children can receive at the Peoria-based hospital.

"I'm really excited to learn today about more of what OSF has to offer here. From what I've already heard, it seems to be such a beautiful place with so many beautiful services. So yeah, I'm excited to learn more today." (:14)

Among the information Marlene learned is that [OSF Children's Hospital](#) has been recognized as a [Best Children's Hospital](#) for 2021-22 by U.S. News & World Report.

The singer-songwriter who plays guitar returns often to visit with friends and family in Central Illinois. Marlene shares she plans to do more to give back to her community.

"I don't ever want Leah Marlene and Leah Marlene's music to be about me, but I want it to be a vessel to give back to the community in whatever way I can, so I'm really grateful for this opportunity." (:13)

Singing her song Flowers as she moved down the hallways, Marlene stopped to wave and talked with parents and, when appropriate, patients, including a teenager who requested the Leonard Cohen song, "Hallelujah," and then began to sing along.

"Hallelujah, Hallelujah." (teen sings louder) "Take it away," Marlene chimes in. "Awe that was so beautiful. Oh my God, your voice is so pretty!" The unidentified teen responds, "YOUR voice is so pretty!" (:17)

The young woman also showed off her sketchbook, filled with vibrant and intricate drawings of anatomy, including the heart, lungs and eyes. Marlene marveled at her talent while someone on the hospital tour suggested the young woman should provide the cover art on the performer's next album.

Tara Plunkett, an advanced practice pediatric critical care nurse, says visits like Marlene's inject much needed joy into what can be a challenging time for patients, families and caregivers.

"There are a lot of tough situations our patients go through, so just to have these moments like this really makes us feel happy and excited to see them feel so happy and to have these up moments." (:17)

Plunkett has seen first-hand how music can be medicine as it reduces stress and anxiety and promotes healing.

“I encourage it with my patients. You can often find me singing with the patients even though I do not have a voice like Leah,” Plunkett shares. (:11)

Marlene breezed past the room of a 4 month-old baby from Indianapolis who became sick during a holiday visit. The mom, Erica Schuldt, was alone while the baby's dad had to return to his job. Hearing the upbeat lyrics and feeling the positive energy from Marlene was the brief escape Schuldt says she needed from what has been a scary and sometimes lonely journey.