I am currently a senior at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and am taking an arts management class as my capstone. My professor encouraged us to attend the Artists Thrive conference this year because it was in a virtual format and we normally wouldn't have had this opportunity to attend. I am very glad that I took the time to attend and participate in a few sessions that I was able to connect with and bring into my personal life.

I attended three sessions on the Tuesday of the conference:
1. an "art break" called Nature Journaling - Exploring Different Types of Lines: Birds
2. Post-Traumatic Growth Mindset keynote
3. Saving Our Stages: Grassroots Efforts to Change Policy.

The **art break** was very fun and cute, we got to draw three different birds from a selection of reference photos taken by the presenter, and then got one minute to draw the first, two minutes for the second, and then had to draw the third bird without looking at the paper in three minutes. My first two turned out cute, my third is barely recognizable as a goose.

The **Post-Traumatic Growth Mindset keynote** focused on mindfulness as a way to nurture, grow, and be successful in our goals. We are living in an extremely stressful world, and so to focus on maintaining our mental health as a step towards reaching our full potential was an excellent thing to hear about. Mental health is often pushed to the side in order to keep up with the chaos of life, and that is detrimental in the long run. We did an exercise where we imagined ourselves in a garden, and explored what we needed to water and nurture within our garden and what we might need to weed out. I need to keep watering my relationships and connections with people in the arts and start weeding out my doubts and imposter feelings.
Saving Our Stages was the session that was the most interesting to me, being in the performance field myself. The main speaker was Hal Real, Founder and CEO of World Café Live, who helped start the National Independent Venue Association just over six months ago at the beginning of the pandemic shutdown. Until now, there has been no national alliance for independent music venues, a need that was noticed by Mr. Real years ago and had influenced his desire to form one on his own for quite a while. NIVA was jump-kicked into reality by the pandemic and the need of performing arts venues to remain for the future; while it was not initially meant to be used for lobbying, the support has pushed legislation on the Save Our Stages bill at a national level. In the 6-months of its existence they now have almost 3,000 members including performance venues, music halls, comedy clubs, and promoters in all 50 states. This was huge new to me, I hadn't heard of NIVA even though I saw a lot of #saveourstages back in April. I am so happy that this is being done, that there is a national alliance of people and independent venues that are struggling together to push through the complications of the pandemic. I love that NIVA exists, and I hope to learn more about it and maybe connect with them in the future.

"I can allow myself to take breaks. I can allow myself to take opportunities to feed my happiness. I can allow myself to thrive."

My biggest takeaway from sitting through these sessions is that I am able to take care of my mental health while also pursuing a difficult career path, and that maintaining good mental health will be the key to my success. I am often very stressed, and so my default setting is just to push those feelings aside and power through whatever I need to do. This is not good, obviously, and has led to a lot more stress in past experiences. One of the speakers emphasized that we need to allow ourselves some basic needs we might be pushing aside in order to work. I need to allow myself to take breaks and focus on what makes me happy and what I want to do sometimes, instead of putting myself completely into what I need to do that may be a big stressor for me. I will absolutely be bringing that with me in the future of my artistic practice. I can allow myself to take breaks. I can allow myself to take opportunities to feed my happiness. I can allow myself to thrive.

Read more about the Summit and view recordings at https://artiststhrive.org/2020summit