

National Arts Action Summit – A Reflection (Speech for 4/21)

For those who I have not had the chance to meet yet, my name is Alex Tolle, and first and foremost, I would like to say thank you. Because of the generosity of the College of Fellows of the American Theatre and Charlene Gordon, I had the immense privilege to attend the National Arts Action Summit as the inaugural Arts Impact Award recipient. This experience was the finale of a fantastic journey that began at my regional KCACTF festival in January of last year and has led me to this point. I am very grateful.

This time last year I attended the College of Fellows luncheon with my ASPIRE Arts Leadership cohort after just winning the Award, not quite sure what to expect. I've definitely grown in this past year, and attending the National Arts Action Summit was crucial in this growth.

It was incredibly inspiring to be surrounded by people, from almost every state in the US, that were passionate about the arts like myself, and from all different disciplines of art. And it was truly a once in a lifetime experience to be in the same room to hear Brian Stokes Mitchell sing and to listen to Rita Moreno tell her life story and how the arts impacted it. Never did I think I would run into Brian, who asked me to call him Stokes, in the halls of the Senate offices and walk together, just the two of us. It's the little things.

All of these magic moments were the reassurance I needed in a very hectic time in my life – the morning after Arts Advocacy Day, I hopped on a train back to Baltimore and began a brand new position at the theatre where I work, Everyman Theatre. It's right in the position's busy season and comes with a lot of work, so I'm taking today to truly live in the moment and not think about what needs to be done when I go back to the office tomorrow.

I learned so much at the summit. It was incredibly informative to hear facts and figures about issues close to my own heart, such as the arts in higher education

and tax law reform that help the arts and artists to thrive. I also learned that even though you may not get to speak directly with your senators or representatives when advocating on the Hill, it is just as important when you get the chance to speak with their staff. Any opportunity you have to tell your story of how the arts have impacted your life is important. Speak from the heart and people will remember.

As I reflect on my time at the Summit, I cannot help but look to the future. My whirlwind journey with the Kennedy Center and the Arts Impact Award may be coming to a close for now, but this will not be the last time I am here. As Gregg Henry told me during my last visit, "This is your artistic home now." That stuck with me. As theatre-makers and theatre administrators, we get to see new places, meet new people, and create works of beauty. And in doing so, we leave pieces of our heart everywhere we go. We get to find new places that feel like home to us.

I get to work in theatre every day. I am very lucky. And as I continue along my path, I hope to learn and grow more and more. In that growth, there are the days that fill your soul with excitement, but there are also days that are calm, maybe a bit stressful, or part of the routine you're establishing. Within the pressure I often put on myself, sometimes unnecessarily, I have to remind myself that I am young and I don't have to do something remarkable every day. I have time. There will be more plays to see, more people to meet, more to learn, and more time to advocate for the art form I fall in love with over and over again. I thank you all for giving me a chance to foster that love.