

A Letter to Tedd Robinson

By Marie Claire Forté

Inspired by the relational, the experiential and the experimental potential of dance, Marie Claire Forté dance, choreograph, write, translate and teach. She is the mother of Imogen Keith whose presence is a force coursing through her. She creates work, including the recent video installation *Mères et mouvements d'enfants* presented in 2022 at the Foreman Gallery in partnership with Sursaut and the Centennial Theatre in Sherbrooke, with the curator and artist Camila Vásquez. She works with artists whom she loves, recently Louise Bédard, Katie Ward and PME-ART. She was Dancer in residence at l'Agora de la danse from 2017 to 2019. In 2016, she created the exhibition project and bilingual publication—*"I'd rather something ambiguous. Mais précis à la fois."* with her friend Sophie Bélair Clément, at the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery. From 2004 to 2008, she danced at the now-defunct Le Groupe Dance Lab in Ottawa, training daily with Peter Boneham.

Dear reader, I am sharing the second of two letters I wrote to Tedd since he passed unexpectedly August 27, 2022. The first letter was about our relationship and his career. The second, here, is about Falling (and Getting Up Again), which you might have just watched. I mention several people, often by their first names – their full names and an incomplete, brief description of them follows the letter.

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Dear Tedd,

Well, Fuck. A second letter! It's a surprising, strong impulse for me. Yves¹ said that as an artist, you weren't afraid of trying things, of giving life to your imagination. Please receive this as a respectful homage to that quality in you. Since you died (six days before Normand², four weeks before Jeanne Renaud, six weeks before Peter's³ brother), I talk to Peter very regularly, almost as regularly as you used to, which makes you present in my life – through him and through this invitation to write about your work – in a way that weren't before.

In the months following Alanna's⁴ father's death, she articulated the complexity of developing a new, inevitably one-sided relationship with him. I hold this as I write about your work *Falling (and Getting Up Again)* (2020), which I saw for the first time in the fall of 2022, when Priscilla⁵ invited me to write about it. It was emotional to watch. I am moved that you succinctly juxtaposed, wove together and encapsulated many of your fascinations: death, desire, rebirth, country life, fashion, tartan, opera, melodrama, theatricality, excess, minimalism, aloneness... I was touched by how strongly Yves Soglo, the director of photography and editor, rendered your craft. I can feel his breath and sensitive choices around distance, angles, focus and rhythm. *Falling* can be seen as a foreshadowing, but it's also the stuff of your art.

"It is a work about death, sex and love, three things that were through lines in most or all of his creations, wrote Tina⁶, with an emphasis on loss." I reached out to her and Charles⁷, whom I know, and I spoke to Yves, whom I didn't know, because I am curious about processes and relationships that support artworks. Your title is an exact description of what you were contending with health-wise. I eventually wrote to Simon⁸, whom you spoke with about your generalized epilepsy diagnosis weeks before you passed. Can I say that here? It's artistically and ethically prickly. It would be strange to omit that you had been dealing with a neurological condition for several years, and that at the time of filming, you were unable to stand for a prolonged time as you would collapse. You wrote me briefly about your primary orthostatic tremor diagnosis in late 2019, offering a sense of scale: "Primary orthostatic tremors are 12-18 tremors per second, essential tremors are about 6-12 and Parkinson's, about 2-6." Simon, who has

epilepsy, wrote about how rare it is to meet someone in contemporary dance who understands constant tremors. You spoke to him of the great distance between conceptual and experiential understanding. You shared how your health struggles increased your admiration of his practice and work. "Receiving this recognition and understanding of my experience was very meaningful, Simon wrote. People quickly forget about the tremors as they aren't always visible." I chart this because it deepens my reading of *Falling*.

I called Yves, which was initially awkward because I confused him with his brother Yvon⁹. You would have cackled over this blunder – you were unafraid of maladroitness! Yves, I learned, is largely self-taught. He has a communications degree. He danced and started filming dance with his brother. You met when he was working as an outside eye for Yvon in 2010. Encountering and filming your work for the first time with *Charles and Tedd do Things with Sticks* (2012), Yves said, "The more I looked, the more questions I had." I loved hearing this, sensing his curiosity. You and Yves worked sans storyboard for *Falling*, he noted – it was just the two of you creating on the fly, with your ideas and a lot of costumes, choosing points of view together.

"It's strange to be more moved now than at the time it was made," expressed Yves. It's unknowable if this was your intention – you were obsessed with death, and it wasn't the first time you died in your artwork. Tina brought up the challenge of considering *Falling* with the "glaring" reality of your passing, which would have been true no matter the time and circumstance. Charles named the music file "Tedd Funeral Song," saying you asked him to try and compose the music as if it were to be played at your funeral. His dramatic adaptation of *Dido's Lament* by Purcell, one of your favourites, is apt.

I have watched *Falling* several times. At first, I was in the sweep of it. Your home, you, your great clothes (high quality casual), nature. The garden gnomes, some of which I remembered. Yves mentioned you receiving permission to film the Buddhist statue, as representations of deities are sensitive. The Buddhist through line of life, death, and reincarnation. The acceleration and retrograde passage with short tableaux, miniature objects in miniature scenes, a kind of distillation of your theatrical works. And then you as Death, your back to us, the camera moving away as Charles sings, "Remember me..."

It was luxurious to dive into the details, both alone and with Yves on the phone. The tiny rainbow in the first scene, the sun refracted on the camera lens. The bird-Phoenix-tree as a particularly charismatic performer, a brilliant combination of dead and alive. Yves laughed that you commanded the wind to lift your tartan blanket when the camera started rolling. Your queer moment(s) with the Monster shoes, the label being one of the few words in the video, along with the lyrics. You sitting, eyes fashionably shaded and face jewelled, balancing on your head a miniature chair, seating a miniature creature, balancing a twig on their head. Yves beautifully articulated different facets of your personality falling: "Public-facing Tedd falls, queer Tedd falls, classic Tedd falls, Tedd as Death falls, red/Japanese-inspired Tedd falls..." A strange, organic head goes from the ground, broken and powdery, and is retrograded and righted to whole, in a black coat – Yves told me it was a large mushroom. The statue of a woman balancing a large stick with small photographs balanced on it. And finally, the

distance between you, black-clad, your back turned away from Yves/the camera/myself/life.

I am roughly the age you were when we met 24 years ago, but I am not as busy with death as you always seemed to have been. Thank you for *Falling (and Getting Up Again)*. Bravo for this enduring trace that beautifully answers some of your questions around memory and legacy. And don't worry, I'll remember you Tedd.

Love,

Marie Claire

NOTES

- 1 Yves Soglo — artist and filmmaker.
- 2 Normand Vandal — friend to myself and Tedd, artist, designer and maker, Peter Boneham's husband and partner of 47 years, died September 1, 2022
- 3 Peter Boneham — my mentor and friend, close friend of Tedd's, dance artist, teacher, Artistic Director and founder of Le Groupe Dance Lab.
- 4 Alanna Kraaijeveld — friend, dance artist.
- 5 Priscilla Guy — friend, dance artist, Artistic Director of Mandoline Hybride, Co-Director of FURIES festival in Marsoui.
- 6 Tina Legari — Tedd's long-time friend, General Manager of 10 Gates Dancing Inc. (Tedd's company), Associate Dance Producer at the National Arts Centre.
- 7 Charles Quevillon — Tedd's friend, composer, performer, and sound designer, collaborated with Tedd for 11 years.
- 8 Simon Renaud — mentee and friend of Tedd's, dance artist.
- 9 Yvon Soglo (Crazy Smooth) — mentee and friend of Tedd's, dance artist, artistic director of Bboyizm.