

## A letter from the EDITOR



# The Visionary

**J**on M. Chu (@jonmchu) likes surprising people—even himself. Our cover star (“Defying Gravity”), the director of the global blockbuster *Wicked*, has the face of an ageless icon but the spirit of someone who understands the urgency of making great art in the present.

During his acceptance speech at the Golden Globes a few weeks ago, Chu said, “We can still make art that is a radical act of optimism, that is empowerment, and that is joy.”

The man clearly understands the moment. The Bay Area native also knows where he’s from and has never lost sight of its impact on his work ethic and creative vision. He practically grew up in his father’s Los Altos restaurant, Chef Chu’s (chefchu.com), and says the conversations he heard there stuck.

“I went there after school every day and did my homework at the bar,” Chu told me. “Customers would come into my dad’s restaurant and share stories about the startup they were working on or whatever they were creating—and always in terms of what tomorrow could look like.”

I think you’ll love this story. It’s the perfect springboard for the year. Chu said, “Life is short, and we only get this time



Jon M. Chu, who grew up in the Bay Area, is the award-winning director of *Wicked* and *Crazy Rich Asians*.

together on a movie to make something that can outlive us, so why not make it a beautiful journey?”

We also focus on other Bay Area visionaries in this issue (“The Changemakers”). From AI pioneers to leaders in the arts, our subjects prove why the region continues to lead the world in bold moves. Mia Chong (@miajchong), the new staging director at ODC (odc.dance), told me, “If we can continue to find ways to utilize dance to encourage awareness, inclusion, kindness and more, we’ll be contributing to the greater good.”

Spoken like someone who understands the power of change.

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These innovators use their personal and professional insight to change lives, improve business and alter communities in the Bay Area and worldwide.

*BY MICHAEL MCCARTHY*

# The CHANGE MAKERS



Mia J. Chong sees dance as a beautiful means of exchange between audiences and performers.

## Mia J. Chong

Staging Director, ODC  
*odc.dance*



Mia J. Chong watched her first ODC performance when she was 3. She later performed alongside dance legends as part of the company. Chong has returned to her artistic home as ODC's staging director. "ODC's approach to athleticism, embellishments on everyday movement and use of social commentary embedded in abstract works have always sparked something in me," she says. "In my new role, I try to focus on each dancer and find ways we can bring out their special talent—the thing that makes them a brilliant artist."

Chong believes dance can transform communities by opening our eyes, helping us feel seen and heard and providing a sense of healing. "I've always seen being an artist as being a disruptor of sorts, and I think dancers and dance-makers in our community constantly push things forward and often make so much out of little to nothing," says the native San Franciscan, who also founded EIGHT/MOVES ([eightmoves.org](http://eightmoves.org)). "Whether it's through creating new works, devising new methods of working and thinking, questioning the status quo and building new traditions or activating and gathering the community around us, I love being part of a constantly evolving dance community."

Chong sees dance as a means of exchange between audiences and performers (and with other audience members) beyond the show. "If we can continue to find ways to utilize dance to encourage awareness, inclusion, kindness and more, we'll be contributing to the greater good," she says.