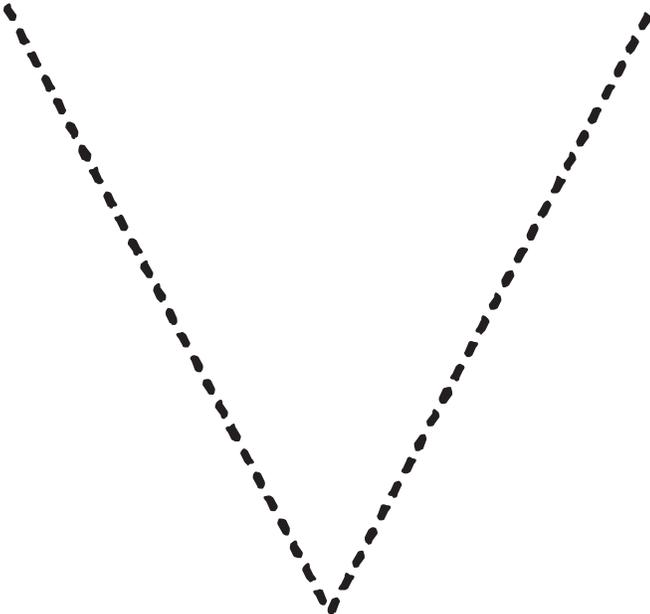


# Jon Platt

## Towering Over *the* Competition

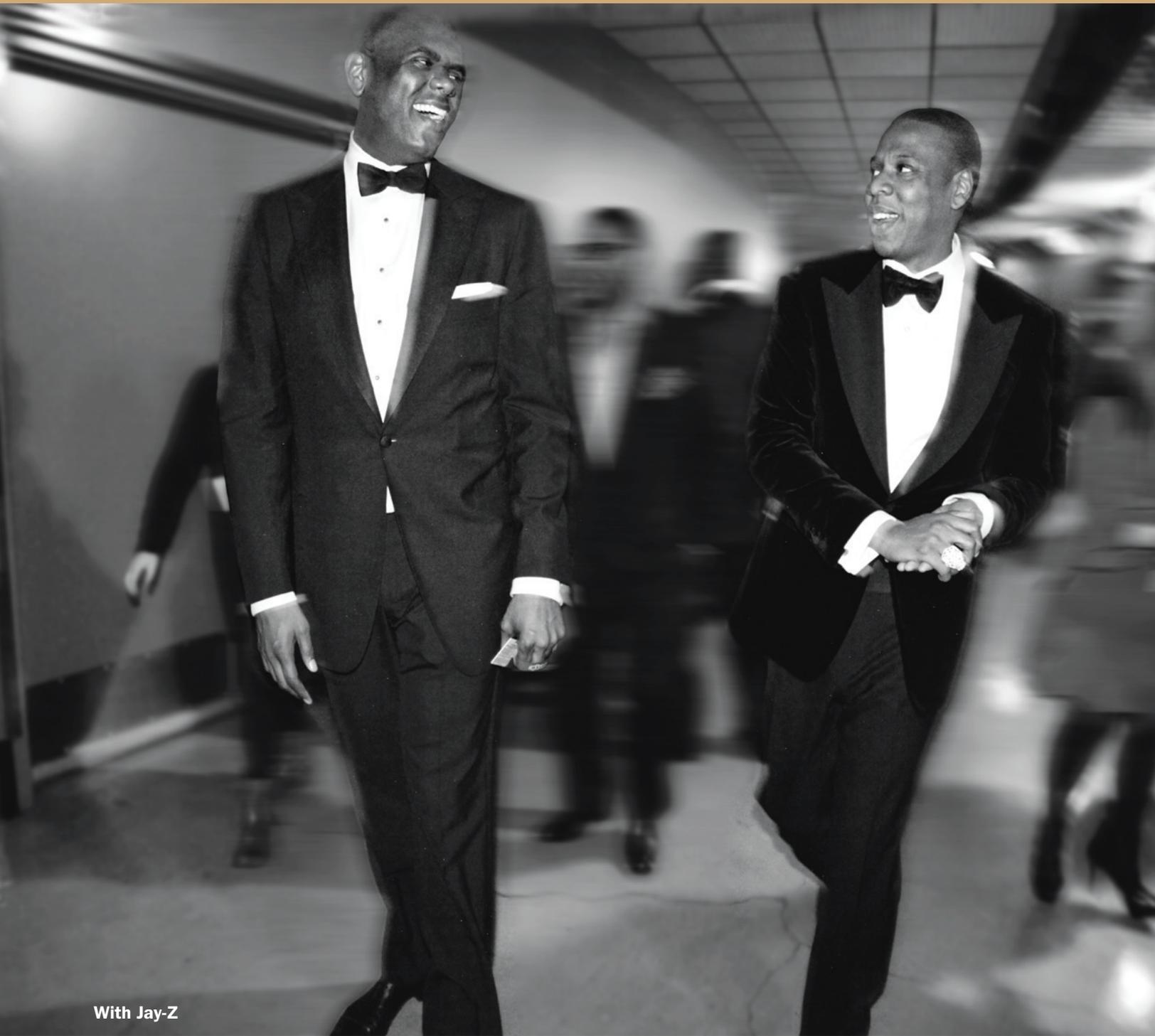


es, Warner/Chappell Music Chairman/CEO Jon Platt is exceptionally tall. But the stature he's achieved in the biz in a relatively short time is even more impressive. So much so, in fact, that the "Big" that used to precede his name is now superfluous (we note that in addition to being tall enough to play, he is an avid hoops fan). And that stature increased considerably in late 2018, when it was announced he would succeed **Marty Bandier** as the head of **Sony/ATV**.

The news came just before Platt was due to receive the Spirit of Life honor at the **City of Hope's** annual industry gala, a black-tie affair made all the more momentous by the big man's career developments. "I dreamed of running the largest publishing company in the world one day," Platt said during his City of Hope speech, alluding to the SATV gig. "Then, a few weeks ago, I opened my eyes—and I could see it."

Platt has overseen sustained global growth and





With Jay-Z

creative expansion at Warner/Chappell. Advocacy on behalf of songwriters has been a constant in his career, and he has been particularly outspoken about accord- ing greater recognition to black music and its creators—and championing diversity, social justice and community in the wider world. He spoke passionately about these themes during his City of Hope speech and also in an in-depth *HITS* interview conducted just ahead of the event.

“I don’t view this as City of Hope just recognizing me,” he said. “I would

like this to be a celebration of the culture which has supported and nurtured me.” And so it was, with his longtime friend and associate **Jay-Z** presenting the award, **Beyoncé** performing, **Pharrell Williams** hosting and other Platt-affiliated perform- ers and speakers chiming in.

“I want you to look around,” he enjoined the throng of industryites at the Spirit of Life dinner, “and see what hap- pens when you don’t exclude anybody.”

While Platt first made his name with some major signings in black music, his

achievements in all genres put him on the top tier. “You can’t look at me and put me in a box,” Platt told his home-town newspaper, *The Denver Post*, in 2010. “I love all music. I don’t love just hip-hop and R&B. That, for me, is one of the blessings of me growing up in Denver. There were so many things going on in Denver on the radio—pop and rock and country. I got a feel for those songs, and I didn’t realize what it meant at that time, but what it taught me was that music has no color. A hit is a hit. The only thing that

pushes it into one genre or another is the approach to the production of the song.”

Platt, who was born in Philly and spent part of his childhood in Oakland before the family relocated to Denver, credits his Mom’s collection of **Motown** records for his early love of soul—and local FM radio for giving him an appreciation of classic rock. “That’s how my taste in music, and songs, became so diverse,” he remembered to *HITS*.

He was working in a Denver sporting-goods store as a teen when he happened to do a good turn for **Thomas Edwards**, a top local DJ, who tracked Platt down and offered to show him the ropes as an expression of his gratitude. “He would give me records and began showing me how to use his turntables,” Platt recalled. “Before long, my high school friends asked me to DJ at a party.” Then, he added, he met another DJ, **Al Your Pal**. “He really taught me how to blend and mix,” the big man says. “He showed me how not to be afraid to talk when I DJ’ed. That changed everything for me.”

**A**n avid student, Platt became a popular DJ in Denver in the late ’80s. Retired basketball star **Chauncey Billups** (once an all-star guard for the **Denver Nuggets** and **Detroit Pistons**, now an ESPN commentator) remembered to *The Denver Post*, “When I was really young, Big Jon was the big-time popular DJ at all the nightclubs and private parties and weddings. If you had Big Jon there, that was the place to be.”

In 1990, a comment from **Public Enemy** front-man **Chuck D** got Platt to envision a bigger future for himself. “He says, ‘So, Big Jon, what are you going to do with your life?’ I said, ‘I’m good here in Denver. I’m the man here.’ Chuck says, ‘Yes, you’re the man here, but unless you dream bigger, that’s all you’re ever going to be.’” The conversation, he says, “really resonated with me, and that’s when I started looking for information”

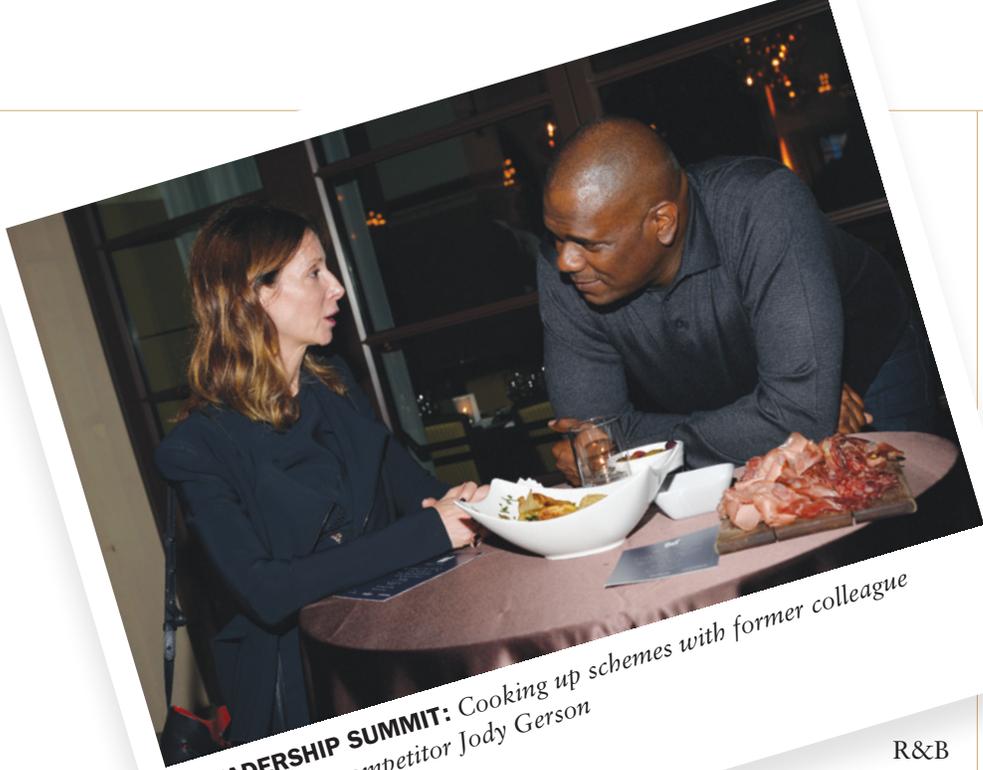
Platt read books about the industry—including **Don Passman**’s seminal *All You Need to Know About the Music Business*—then moved to Los Angeles and began promoting and managing



**LEGENDARY:** With biz icon **Clarence Avant** and Recording Academy chief **Neil Portnow**



**TO SIRE, WITH LOVE:** With **Seymour Stein**



**LEADERSHIP SUMMIT:** Cooking up schemes with former colleague and current competitor Jody Gerson



**"DREAM BIGGER":** With Chuck D

R&B and hip-hop artists. He met **Steve Prudholme**, a Creative Manager at **EMI Music Publishing**, who later signed Platt's first client, **Madukey**, as well as producer **Kiyamma Griffin**. In 1995, Prudholme left EMI to join **Warner Bros.** and put in a good word for Platt to be his replacement.

Platt was a presence at the EMI offices even before he was hired. "He would go in the tape room and borrow DATs from the DAT machine," **Jody Gerson** remembers. "And I would say, 'Wait a minute, I don't understand. Who's the guy working from our conference room and taking all of our DATs to make music and having meetings?' And it was Jon. He literally showed up and set up office."

Gerson made it official by hiring Platt as Creative Manager. Within six months of his arrival he signed **Marqueze Ethridge**, who wrote TLC's 1995 smash

"Waterfalls," a Grammy nominee for Record of the Year, as well as **AZ** (who wrote "Life's a Bitch" for **Nas**); not long thereafter he inked **Warryn Campbell** and gospel duo **Mary Mary**. He rose swiftly through the ranks—Creative Director, VP, Senior VP, Executive VP, President of West Coast, Creative. He spent 17 years at the company, rising to the position of President of North America, Creative.

"He was relentless," Gerson recalled during the City of Hope kickoff. "Very few executives I've hired compare to Jon and his integrity, work ethic and deep relationships."

Relentless though he was, Platt revealed that he was also, in the early days, often flying by the seat of his pants. Eager to sign **Jay-Z**, whose *Reasonable Doubt* album was blowing up, he says, "I was so innocent that I cold-called the label looking for him." After being transferred around, he found himself in a contentious phone exchange with **Dame Dash**. "He starts aggressively firing all these questions at me: 'You got some money? You got some paper? If you haven't got money, there's no conversation to be had.' I got so flustered I told him I'd call him right back." Later, though, Platt got a clearer shot at **Jay-Z** when his friend **Jay Brown** made a formal introduction, and the young hip-hop breakout soon joined EMI's stable.

One of Platt's signature moves has been to sign important writers early in their careers. The **Jay-Z** deal was closed in 1996, the year of *Reasonable Doubt's* release. He scored a pact with **Usher** a year later as his sophomore album, *My Way*, became his breakthrough, having been introduced to the young star by longtime friend **Jermaine Dupri**. He signed **Kanye West** in 2003 before he released his first single, "Through the Wire." He signed **Drake** in 2009 just as his first hit, "Best I Ever Had," exploded. He noted in 2018 that he didn't realize, during much of his EMI tenure, that his freedom to sign—"I had never been told that I couldn't do a deal"—was unique.

"These people have been with me their whole career," Platt told *The Denver Post*. "That's the thing about most of the people I sign. We got in business together at the beginning of their career."

Said Jay-Z at the City of Hope event, “My contract is tied to his; if he leaves, I leave, period.” He also hailed Platt as “the **Obama** of the music industry.”

“All of us recognize that he found us as seeds,” **Pharrell Williams** says. “Back then, we didn’t know how to blossom.”

Platt also signed **Diddy**, **Beyoncé**, **Ludacris**, **Rick Ross** and **Young Jeezy**, among others, to EMI.

**T**he big man has been effusive about the importance of the mentors in his life. “Marty Bandier is an icon, make no mistake about it,” he proclaimed, adding that the longtime King of Music Publishing “has played a big role in who I am today.”

In noting the essential importance of trust in the A&R process, he said, “What I learned was, trust comes from the top—that was from Marty, Jody and **Roger [Faxon]**. Trust was handed to me, and it was up to

me who I wanted to pass that onto.”

In 2011, Platt and Gerson were honored with the Music Visionary Award from the **UJA-Federation of New York**. Platt was presented the award by **Sean “Diddy” Combs**, who called him “the most influential music publisher in the business.”

In June 2012, Platt announced that he was leaving EMI after 17 years. There was much speculation over the summer as to whether Platt would join **Cameron Strang**, chief executive of Warner/Chappell, or rejoin his former mentor, **Bandier**, at Sony/ATV. **Rihanna** jumped the gun on an official announcement of Platt’s move when she tweeted, “Congratulations to one of the best people in this industry, Jon Platt, on his new position as head of Warner/Chappell.”

Strang noted, “When I met Jon we were competitors and associates in this great publishing business. Now we’re partners at Warner/Chappell. When I got the job I knew that there was one person I needed to

make Warner/Chappell as great as it could be [and that] was Jon Platt.”

Platt started at Warner/Chappell that September as President of Creative, North America. Just four months into his new gig, Platt (and VP A&R **Ryan Press**) signed the red-hot **Mike Will Made-It**. Other early signings included Jay-Z and Beyoncé, **Roc Nation’s** publishing roster, **Aloe Blacc**, Drake’s **OVO Sounds** label, **Megadeth’s Dave Mustaine**, **Slash** and **Liz Rose**.

The Warner/Chappell roster also includes **Katy Perry**, **Kendrick Lamar**, **Nate Ruess**, **The Dream**, **Mike Dean**, **Julia Michaels**, **Justin Tranter**, **Twenty One Pilots**, **Chris Stapleton**, **Dr. Dre** and **Brantley Gilbert**.

Platt was promoted to President, North America in December 2013; CEO in November 2015 and Chairman in May 2016.

“JON HAS RISEN TO HIS POSITION NOT JUST BECAUSE OF TALENT BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF HIS TREMENDOUS HEART.” —JAY BROWN



“WARNER DAYS: With Len Blavatnik and Cameron Strang



**HOPE AND CHANGE:** *With City of Hope industry board members Gang, Tyre, Ramer & Brown's Don Passman, CAA's Rob Light, Phil Q, Loeb & Loeb's John Frankenheimer, UME boss Bruce Resnikoff, Jody Gerson, W/C's Clark Miller, Kathy Nelson, Morey Management's Jason Morey, Spirit Music Group's David Renzer, UMPG's Evan Lamberg, The Davis Firm's Doug Davis and AEG Presents' Larry Vallon*

Platt has a knack for matching songs (even in their embryonic form) with the right artists. He brought Jay-Z what became the biggest hit of his career, “Empire State of Mind,” and Beyoncé what became one of her biggest recent hits, “Drunk in Love.”

“He has an amazing ear and sense of knowledge because publishing isn’t just a business, it’s an art,” Sean Combs said of Platt. “Finding the right writer and knowing who to team them up with and how to maximize their brand—he has a gift, a natural talent for it. He knows how to build relationships. He’s built relationships with me and a lot of the guys who are the future of music.”

Warner/Chappell had the three most nominated songwriter/artists at the Grammy Awards in January—Jay-Z, Kendrick Lamar and Bruno Mars. Another

of its writers, Julia Michaels, was up for Best New Artist.

One of Platt’s boldest and most influential moves was changing the way samples are paid. The traditional model in hip-hop publishing called for a song’s producer and songwriter to share the licensing expense of any samples used in a song. Platt created a system in which producers foot the entire bill for samples they use in their clients’ work.

“It was a thing people said would never fly, it would never happen, but really it revolutionized the business... He was pushing the envelope and changing the game,” Jay-Z said.

Since becoming Warner/Chappell’s global CEO in 2016, Platt has built an executive team that includes A&R co-heads **Katie Vinten** and Ryan Press; Warner/Chappell Nashville president **Ben Vaughn**, U.K. man-

aging director **Mike Smith** and global digital exec **Eric Mackay**. In another canny move, he added former SONGS partner **Carianne Marshall** as COO in 2018.

“Jon Platt is one of the best publishers in America and has done a wonderful job for that company and will continue to do a great job,” renowned attorney **Joel Katz** asserted. “We represent Jon Platt, and we’re very proud of the work that he’s done.”

In Q3 2017, W/C surged to #1 in publisher marketshare, scoring a 23% slice and becoming the #1 country publisher. Vaughn cited the “amazing encouragement” of his boss when the pubco took ASCAP’s Country Publisher of the Year award for the fifth year in a row (W/C took ASCAP’s Latin and BMI’s Pop honors earlier in the year). His aggressive approach to the company’s global

structure paid marketshare dividends as well—in the U.K. in particular but also in Germany, where he launched a new Berlin office.

At one point in the year the company had #1 spots on 10 radio charts. “This latest accomplishment reinforces what we already know: that our focus on putting songwriters first is putting Warner/Chappell first—and that our songwriters are creating the biggest hits around the world,” Platt proclaimed in a congratulatory missive to his staff. That fall, *Ebony* put Platt on its Power 100 list. In early 2018, Platt joined U.K. boss Smith and team in London to bear witness to a string of wins at the **BRIT Awards**.

The pubbery chief also took considerable satisfaction in the valedictory honors accorded longtime friend and signing Jay-Z, notably multiple **Grammy** nods, a special award at **Clive Davis’** pre-Grammy gala and induction into the **Songwriters Hall of Fame**. Jay is the first rapper to join the SHOF ranks.

He’s been particularly outspoken not only about diversity but also about protecting the integrity of authentic music culture. “What I’ve learned through the years is that the greatest songwriters are the ones with distinctive voices who stay true to their roots,” he reflected in a letter published by **Music Business Worldwide** in 2017, specifically referencing the U.K.’s uncompromising grime subgenre. “I’m all for crossing over—as long as the mainstream crosses over to you.”

“It’s not just my turn,” he said of the responsibility associated with the City of Hope honor during the kickoff breakfast in L.A. “It’s my *culture’s* turn to do our part.”

By the time the actual gala came around on 10/11, of course, news of Platt’s forthcoming exit from Warner/Chappell and pending assumption of the top post at Sony/ATV had made the industry rounds, making the occasion that much more auspicious.

In addition to his primary professional work, he has served as Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors for the **MusiCares Foundation** and sits on the boards of the Songwriters Hall of Fame, the **Motown Museum**,

and the **Living Legends Foundation**.

In 2005, he launched the **Big Jon Platt Scholarship Program**, which awards scholarships at Platt’s alma mater, **Montbello High School** in Denver. The scholarships go to three students each year—one who has achieved academic excellence, one who has overcome adversity and stayed in school and one who wants a career in the music industry.

Platt also supports the **Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation**. (His wife, **Angie**, serves on the Los Angeles Chapter Board of Directors and the International Board of Directors.) The Platts have three sons, **Jonathan, Clarence** and **Shawn**.

“First and foremost, Jon is a brother,” says Roc Nation Co-Founder/CEO **Jay Brown**. “He is not just someone I know because of this industry. Jon has risen to his position not just because of talent but also because of his tremendous heart. The love he has for his beautiful wife and children extends to everyone who has the honor to cross paths with him. Jon has no problem calling you in the middle of the night with an amazing idea or song he just heard, because he knows music moves the world. When you think of all Jon has done over the years, you think in the scope of what he has done for **The Culture**, not just the music business. Jon not only has a vision for an artist’s career, he has a passion that cannot be measured.”

Platt was emotional on the night of his black-tie Spirit of Life ceremony. “This is the worst thing, for a big black dude to be sniffing and shit,” he joked. He praised his fellow successful executives of color and hailed City of Hope as an organization that doesn’t “know the meaning of the word ‘impossible.’” The event raised in excess of \$6 million for cancer research and treatment. Platt’s lifelong friends then gathered for a boisterous afterparty, with his old pal Dupri serving as DJ.

Platt himself has regularly proved seemingly impossible tasks eminently possible, and his next chapter promised still greater heights.

“This is my life,” Platt told *The Denver Post*. “It’s a dream. It doesn’t get much better than this.”•

“I DREAMED OF RUNNING THE LARGEST PUBLISHING COMPANY IN THE WORLD ONE DAY,” PLATT SAID DURING HIS CITY OF HOPE SPEECH, ALLUDING TO THE FORTHCOMING SONY/ATV GIG. “THEN, A FEW WEEKS AGO, I OPENED MY EYES—AND I COULD SEE IT.”