

Written by Jeff Ignatius
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Jonathan Tyler has described his band's major-label debut, *Pardon Me*, as a “handshake album” – an introduction.

But unlike that description or the apologetic title, there's nothing polite about the full-bore rock produced by Jonathan Tyler & the Northern Lights – which will perform at the Redstone Room on July 7.

USA Today concisely summarized the appeal of the band in naming *Pardon Me* a [pick of the week last year](#)

: “Did you think they'd quit making bands that groove as hard as they rock? You know, like ZZ Top, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and Aerosmith? Listen to this riff-heavy blast, the title track from this band's debut album, and think again.”

With its blend of Southern and hard rock paired with Tyler's charismatic vocals, the album's first half is an undeniable statement – catchy, anthemic, loud, and big – that sustains the listener through the more-muted back end. Standouts include scorchers “Young & Free” and “Devil's Basement” – the latter sounding like Monster Magnet through a bluesy filter – but “Gypsy Woman” eclipses them with a soaring chorus contrasted with big-beat verses.

Yet Tyler – who in a phone interview this week sounded like the polar opposite of his outsize stage persona – said the band's next album is likely to air things out a little.

He declined to fault *Pardon Me*, but his comments about it suggest some retrospective regret.

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“It was our best effort at that time, and it came from a really good place,” he said. “And I think ... what really matters at the end of the day is the motive behind it, and the heart behind it. I can say that it was pure and we had good intentions and the best of motives.”

Chalk that faint praise up to the band’s studio learning curve. While Tyler said the next album – which he hopes to record this winter – isn’t far enough along in the writing process to discuss, he did say the band will take a different approach to performance and recording.

“One of the biggest things I feel like I’ve learned is just space, and how to play less,” he said. “Use the space, where there’s nothing going on – let that be an instrument, rather than play all the time.” Similarly, he said, he’d like to use more acoustic guitars and a bigger room on the next record. (The opening piano and warm a cappella harmonies of *Pardon Me*’s “Ladybird” hint at a group far more adventurous than the record’s big-rock songs suggest.)

That approach, Tyler said, will partly be an attempt to keep the lyrics from being overwhelmed by the band. In a genre in which the words often approach irrelevance, Tyler said losing lyrics to the noise “kind of bums me out. ... I think it’s as big a part of it as anything else. To me, it’s probably *the* most important thing outside of the actual harmony, the melody of the music that’s coming out.”

Tyler said he’s most influenced lyrically by Charles Bukowski, and although he immediately backtracked, he said his biggest challenge in songwriting is courage: “I’m trying to get the balls to say the things I really want to say.”

That’s a personal obstacle rather than a function of being on a major label, he said: “If they don’t like it, then they don’t have to sell our product.” But he added that he struggles with whether he wants to be “that open with everybody. Do you really want to tell all?”

As for signing with Atlantic in 2007 – at a time when many artists have eschewed the traditional label infrastructure of the music business – Tyler said his band’s experience has been great.

“We haven’t had any sort of clashing with each other yet,” he said. “I know it happens. If it

Grooving as Hard as They Rock: Jonathan Tyler & the Northern Lights, July 7 at the Redstone Room

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doesn't, it's just going to be a wonderful relationship."

Jonathan Tyler & the Northern Lights will perform on Thursday, July 7, at the Redstone Room (129 Main Street in Davenport). The show starts at 8:30 p.m. Tickets are \$10 and available from RedstoneRoom.com.

For more information on Jonathan Tyler & the Northern Lights, visit JonathanTylerMusic.com.