

CONCERT | PREVIEW

# Splinters and screws

## Guitarist Neal Tiemann fought the wall and the wall won

BY MATT GLEASON

World Scene Writer

There's a screw in the left hand of Neal Tiemann, the Midwest Kings' guitarist and primary lyricist.

It found its way there after the now 21-year-old local musician went mano a mano with a brick wall.

The wall won.

Tiemann was 18 then, and as angry as if his beloved Firebird had burned to ashes.

But Tiemann couldn't very well wallop his then-girlfriend, or the bloke she was with. So, he accidentally shattered three bones in the his hand — a match for his fractured heart.

### MIDWEST KINGS CD RELEASE PARTY

**When:** 8:30 p.m. Saturday

**Where:** Parking lot behind In the Raw Sushi, 3321 S. Peoria

**Admission:** \$7 in advance, \$10 day of show

Funny thing is, the day before, Tiemann had recorded a tune called "Splinter."

MWK included the tune, and another song that addresses the same relationship, "Waiting Room," on its latest disc, "Judging a Bullet."

Its chorus speaks of a splinter lodged in his hand that's always there to remind him how the past can tear him down.

The screw/splinter actually almost tore Tiemann's musical career down, like some vacant, derelict shanty.

Ultimately, Tiemann got over the girl, but couldn't bear being estranged from his six-string, so he opted for the screw instead of a procedure that might have fixed his hand better, but also had the risk of making him unable to play.

Tiemann can play the guitar, but arthritis-like pains plague him every morning and every night.

Breaking his hand, though, was a good thing, if you're a look-on-the-upside kind of person.

"That was kind of the end, metaphorically, of my teenage aggression," he said. "I broke my hand and then I learned that I need to channel that (emotion) through my music and stop being so pissed off at the world and hitting brick walls."

"Judging a Bullet" seems to find Tiemann still venting that aggression, as he grinds and wails a musical path for lead singer Andy Skib to blaze over with a voice some might compare to that of Caroline's Spine front man Jimmy Newquist, or Jason Wade of Lifehouse.

Skib has said he marvels at Tiemann's guitar work and songwriting, while Tiemann said he admires Skib's vocals.

"If I was in a band competing with Andy, I'd quit," Tiemann said. "Andy has such a beautiful voice. He's got something that's real reminiscent of early- to mid-'90s grunge singers.

"To me, his voice is something real fresh, something



KELLY KERR / Tulsa World

The Midwest Kings are (from left) Robby Merrick, Neal Tiemann, Andy Skib and Justin Briggs.

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