

Hunt's poetic compass pointing to Wanaka

For New Zealand's most famous poet, Sam Hunt, inspiration comes when "a sound is mixed with silence", but the ideas usually evaporate unless he gets them down on paper very quickly.

The Kiwi king of bards will take to the stage in Wanaka from January 12 as the opening act at Outspoken – a festival of words and storytelling where he will give three performances.

He will be bringing some new work and performing his *Songs For the Tone Deaf* but Hunt says he never writes poetry especially for an occasion.

"If someone has a grandfather turning 180 next week, then no, I don't write a poem for that.

"Poems come from a different source.

"The place is important to me – where a place is and where you come from," he says.

"Environment gives you your poetic bearings . . . often it's a phrase which seems to set something off. Not so much subterranean, but subconscious."

Hunt, 67, has been writing poetry since he was seven.

In fact, his first published poem, *Christmas 1953*, written back then has just earned him a nice fee as it's now been published on a company Christmas card.

Hunt says you've got to "listen and pause" for that poetic inspiration to come.

"It's like waking from a dream. It's usually evaporated unless you get it down very quickly.

"They go. I don't know where, but the ones I catch, I'm not always pleased with them," he says.

For Hunt a poem is never really complete.

Sometimes he opts for different versions of his poems.

"If it's been birthed I remember it.



Bard: Sam Hunt will be performing at Wanaka's Outspoken festival of words and storytelling.

Fast facts

What: Outspoken – a festival of words and storytelling featuring top NZ acts

Where: Wanaka

When: January 12 – February 18, 2014. Performances every Tuesday and schools' programme.

Sam Hunt performances: January 12 at Oakridge Resort, 4pm; January 13, fundraising dinner at Bistro Gentil, 6pm; January 14, Carrick Winery, 5.30pm

More info: outspokenfestival.co.nz.

It's like being pregnant with poems. If you have a good birth the poem always becomes one of your children and you don't forget it."

The Wanaka festival runs for six weeks and has attracted some of the country's best wordsmith acts.

Hunt says he's looking forward to hearing the other top acts, including South Auckland Poet's Collective.

Performer and Poetic Justice Wanaka founder Liz Breslin says the festival is "about debunking the myth that words are only for bookworms".

"I'm really excited to be performing among a group of such strong, diverse voices."