

Hunt first to tell it like it is at fest

Sue Fea

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, for which 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," says Hunt.

"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 7. 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 dif-

WHAT'S ON

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

ferent versions of his poems.

"If it's been birthed I remember it. 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."

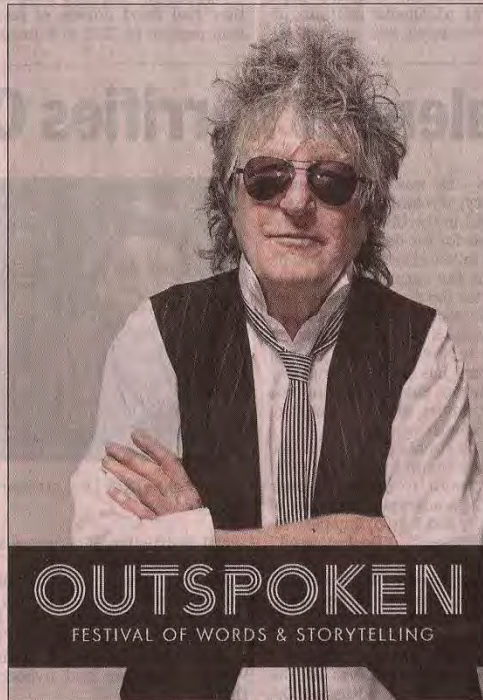
One of his works, which appeared in the United States as one of Christchurch man Jim Wilson's Poster Poems – Kiwi poets' works pasted up on poles, walls and in cafes overseas – prompted an email of praise from an elderly Massachusetts poet that Hunt has admired for years.

He's a bit concerned about the way the written word is heading as young people focus so heavily on new technology.

"I mean these fantasy conversations and stuff, I do wonder." But he says it's not all bad.

Hunt is looking forward to meandering his way south to Central Otago for the January gig, either via the Pig Route or up the river from Lawrence.

"The Outspoken organisers are doing a marvellous job. They're concentrating on the word and not dressing it up in any other way. It's



Out there: Sam Hunt will perform at Wanaka's Outspoken festival of words and storytelling.

people telling it as it is," says Hunt.

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, Sue Wootton and the Tourettes, to name a few.

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

worms". "Storytelling is a wonderful medium for fostering self-confidence, so we are also taking performers to the schools and giving locals an audience with the Wanaka Showcase.

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

Outspoken is a non-profit initiative, spearheaded by kick-started by generous patronage from Wanaka restaurant owner Luc Bohyn.