



## Local agency: The famous Phantom Billstickers

**The enigmatic Jim Wilson founded Phantom Billstickers, New Zealand's favourite poster and street media company back in 1982, mainly to give musicians, the arts and creative people in New Zealand a voice, and to use posters on walls to put "bums on seats".**

The company is so much more than that though, contributing greatly to the feel of our neighbourhood and sensitively seeding what they like to call "flora for the concrete jungle."

When I sit with Jim's vivacious American wife Kelly over coffee at Phantom's local - the legendary Philippe's Chocolates - she starts by handing me the 10th edition of the company's in-house publication: the inspiring quarterly known as The Café Reader. Most definitely not your usual free flyer or zine, it is something of an alternative literary journal and is awash with names both famous and soon-to-be so. It's about offering you something to read over your coffee; then pick up and take with you. It's a natural extension for the company devoted to spreading the word about poetry, music, the arts and more, and follows on nicely from their Poems on Posters project that started in 2008 and has seen thousands of poetry posters put up around the world on poles, in cafes and across walls.

Jim has said in the past that printing poems on posters "is largely about hope", and that the goal of the Poems on Posters Project is to "give poets a hearing and bring a softer voice into the streets." I personally love seeing

them pop up regularly around this neighbourhood, and I know I'm not alone. This year Phantom has gone a step farther for the written word, picking up the official sponsorship for National Poetry Day. "Year round we solicit poems from folks," Kelly explains, "and when we have space we put them up all around New Zealand and overseas. When we were approached to take over the sponsorship of the event it just seemed like the most obvious, organic thing to do. It's very cool."

She says that the connection between Phantom and poetry "has been a bit of a non sequitur for some people, but when you see the way that the company has evolved and Jim's vision, it really makes sense." He has always been dedicated to getting voices heard - the voices of his artists, the voices of touring artists, the voices of poets both known and unknown - and Kelly says Jim recognises how hard it is to get your voice heard in a country of just over four million people. "It's hard for an artist to gather a wider audience for their work," she says, "so if we can help them get heard here or even outside of their own country, that's what it's all about."

As aforementioned, Jim started the business to promote bands he was working with many years ago, and

I personally have known numerous musicians who have done their time in the Phantom vans, papering walls at all hours of the night (and early morning). Is that a rite of passage these days for your average Kiwi muso?

"Like a scholarship?" laughs Kelly, before admitting that their choice of employee is a lot more organic than that. "It used to be that musicians were often the only people willing to go and put up posters in the middle of the night under a bridge somewhere, but Jim has spent time negotiating with councils so that we can do that sort of work whenever and there is no longer any stigma attached to it." Having said that, she adds with even more laughter, "our General Manager played in a band, one of our sales people plays in a band. In fact, everyone who works for Phantom was either in a band or is in one currently... or is leaving Phantom to tour with one!"

As well as his philanthropic work, Jim has also spent a decent amount of time lobbying councils for poster space, and innovations by Phantom in terms of what they can offer clients are always on the increase. Some of the finest examples of this can be seen along the Ponsonby Road strip, and part of this is down to the fact that as well as an artistic bent, Phantom has a commercial backbone in place as well. "If you can't do the commercial stuff then you can't do the arts stuff," says Kelly, who has a background in advertising and most definitely knows her stuff when it comes to marketing and working that commercial angle. They have council contracts in various cities as well, and with elements like specialty lighting and framing being added to the average poster run option, Phantom are most definitely taking the possibly-ordinary and making it a little less so.

May their flora for the concrete jungle flourish - our city central neighbourhood is a lot better looking for it. (HELENE RAVLICH) [PNI](#)

[www.0800phantom.co.nz](http://www.0800phantom.co.nz)

