

PERSONALITIES



A CHRIS NEEDS PRIMER:
In Wales - and most other countries - Needs is one of the most famous celebrities on BBC Radio: his nightly radio program *The Friendly Garden* reaches about 8 million listeners worldwide. He was awarded a Membership of the Order of the British Empire personally from Queen Elizabeth II of England for his charity work, and he is an author, actor and musician who played keyboard for Bonnie Tyler (below). -

music. The show can go from hilarious to depressing to heartwarming and back again within the span of three hours.

Needs acknowledges that his time slot has much to do with the intimacy of his program, and perhaps directly to do with the intimacy of his relationship to his listeners.

"[My listeners are] in bed with their problems or their loneliness, or whatever," explains Needs, who identifies as a gay man. "They tell me the most intimate things, and they forget they're on the radio. They tell me things about very awkward places of their bodies where they've had operations, or they tell me secrets about him or her and his or her boyfriend have split up over this and that, and I'm going, 'My God, do they realize they're on the radio, not just on the phone?!' I think they forget."

Needs' most recent book, *The Jenkins's's's's's*, aims an animated spotlight on the misadventures of "a dysfunctional family in Wales, the ones who are always claiming social security and benefits; the only ones on their street with a Jacuzzi, a sports car, they're all sort of fiddling the system," says Needs.

The book was recently turned into a film, which won the Best Animated/CGI award at this year's Swansea Bay Film Festival. Needs will introduce the movie at a U.S. premiere screening as part of a presentation on next year's Americymru International Film Festival; the event will be held in Portland in August 2010 as a celebration of Welsh- and Celtic-inspired film and filmmakers.

Armed with a legion of loyal followers, the head lettuce in the Friendly Garden is setting his sights on Portland—not to con-



quer yet another demographic, but to expand the world's scope on Welsh culture.

"There are Welsh people all over the world, hundreds and hundreds of Welsh societies," says Needs. "We've got something to shout about, because we love what we are. We like our music, we *love* our language. We're taking home abroad. It's like Mardi Gras, but this is for the Welsh, not for the gay. It'll probably be for both, actually."

For good measure, "It's like a make believe cuckoo land," explains Needs. "But [my listeners] feel included. It's a big comfort zone, but because it's screaming, *screaming* gay—I mean absolutely as gay as you can get it—nobody is threatened by it really."

Get ready, Portland! Cuckoo Land comes west! 

For more information on the Left Coast Eisteddfod, visit www.americymru.ning.com. For more information on Chris Needs and the Friendly Garden Association, visit www.bbc.co.uk/wales/radiowales.



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