From the stonewall-lined and tree-covered road leading you into our village, to the sweeping vistas from atop Cadillac Mountain, there is a special mystique to Bar Harbor.

Come and renew your sense of wonder.

Bar Harbor & Acadia National Park

A short drive, but feels like a world away

VisitBarHarborOnline.com • 888.540.9997

Photograph by Sue Anne Hodges
It’s a long way from Caribou to Hong Kong, but 27-year-old, newly engaged Tess Collins makes the crossing several times a year.

It’s one thing to take the plunge and study at the University of Hartford’s prestigious Hartt School of Music; it’s another to put your money where your mouth is on stage. And not just any stage. This star can often be found in front of an intimate crowd of 20,000 people at Happy Valley Racecourse in the center of glittering Hong Kong, “the noisiest place on Earth, where anything is possible.”

Think of it: a Maine Yankee in Leung Chun-Ying’s Qīyu.

Collins’s aunt, Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine), just named one of Washington’s most powerful women by ELLE Magazine, certainly has the world’s ear. But “Baby Tess,” as her fellow musicians have nicknamed her in Hong Kong, is exploring a different, very bluesy, dimension all her own. We caught up with her when she was back in Maine for a week.

Are you still the headliner at the Mandarin Oriental in Hong Kong?

I haven’t done hotels for three years. I manage myself. I’m my own agent. I represent myself and do huge events for clients like BMW, Infiniti, Ferrari, Chanel, Omega, and Piaget watches in Shanghai, Beijing, even Chengdu, home of the panda bear. Six nights a week in a hotel—it can get hard. It can get lonely in a hotel.

One of my biggest shows is the famous Hong Kong Jockey Club. It goes back to 1884. Horse racing is huge for the Chinese. You’ll see 20,000 people there every Wednesday night. I sing a song with my band between every horse race. Everybody loves the atmosphere. Gambling, drinking—that’s their relaxation. There’s so much money. The Hong Kong Jockey Club has been such a big advocate for performers, too, because they make sure you’re on TV. You get exposure you...
What other jazz clubs do you perform in Hong Kong?
Salon De Ning is the deco jazz club on the lowest level of the iconic Peninsula Hotel in Hong Kong, which dates to 1929. Lucky Room 888 is where the Japanese signed the treaty to end World War II. I’ve loved singing at Salon De Ning and became friendly with some of the staff members who are superstitious. In the old days, officers would come here and meet their Chinese women. Mrs. Ning haunts the place. Lights switch on when they’re supposed to be off. The microphone turns on and off.

Then there’s the elevator. Sometimes it bypasses all the floors to the basement and you can hear the ghosts of soldiers marching. It’s actually where the soldiers did train.

How about beyond Hong Kong?
I’ve performed in Aria, the jazz club in Beijing, and Atmosphere, on the top floor of a skyscraper with sweeping views of Beijing. I was just in Guangzhou this past weekend, doing a show for BMW. They flew me in to sing two songs. They put me up.

I perform for the CEOs and top executives as they announce the new models they’re unveiling. For BMW I sang “Hall of Fame,” by The Script. “Living in the hall of fame; everybody knows your name.”

I sang jazz at an “007” theme event for Sennheiser’s high-end microphones and headphones [prices start at 2,000 euros]. Their first market was Europe, but now they’ve recognized Asia is the place to go.

You’re…living in a movie.
Sometimes I feel surreal, making a living as a musician and getting respect for my talent. In the U.S., sometimes, unless you’re a superstar, people say, “Oh, you’re a musician…” In China, they love Western people, and you get treated like a superstar.

I was hungry after a show recently. I said to my driver, I want to get some food. He didn’t speak much English, but he wanted so much to take me to what he considered American food. He took me to KFC, but I said no thanks. Then he brightened and wrote a big M on his hands. He thought, as a Gweilo (“white ghost”), that’s what I wanted to eat.

We’re in the audience now, watching you. What’s the first thing you say to us when you address the audience?
If I’m in a small club, I say, How y’all doing? Everybody thinks I’m from the South. It’s somehow more engaging and more relaxed than How do you do? After all my songs I say xièxiè nǐmen. It’s their slang for thank you, everybody.

Is there a fascination for Western jazz in China, and do you know some Chinese performers who specialize in it?
Locals sing jazz, but they’ll be singing in Chinese. If they’re famous, they’ll sing Canto pop. Hong Kong is so international—many native Hong Kong residents send their kids to England, the U.S., or Canada. So if some local musicians play jazz amazingly, it’s because they’ve learned how to play it in, say, New York.

In The Last Emperor, the young Westernized emperor noodles around with “Am I Blue.” When do you slide into scat?
“Blue Skies,” by Ella Fitzgerald. “I Can’t Give You Anything But Love.” It depends on the vibe. If you’re inspired by the musicians around you, you tend to take more chances.

There’s a YouTube of you at Old Orchard Beach, improvising: “Tell Tess Collins three words to sing and see what happens.” [To listen, follow our link on portlandmonthly.com]
I have to have that taken down. One of my talents is to be on the spot. It doesn’t hurt if you can start singing about the audience members or tell a story. It gets them more involved.

Takes us to your apartment.
I live in the Mid-Levels, on the island, in Central Hong Kong. You can hear everything, buses. You get woken up by drilling. Our actual wall shakes. It’s a very noisy city, even at 5 a.m. I’ve heard someone say it’s like New York in the 1980s, so much hustle and bustle. People out all the time. I can’t see the harbor, which would cost me a lot more money, but you can see spots of the water.

Happy Valley seems dreamlike. What’s it like, seeing posters of yourself as the featured performer amid Chinese characters? Is it like Being John Malkovitch, except it’s you?
The first time I was taken aback, I was in Beijing with two friends from Caribou. We had gone to the Great Wall. We went downstairs in our hotel to take money out. By the ATM was my picture, bigger than I am. That was the moment. Everybody taking money out.

Then there’s the superscript at the horse races, seeing my name with Chinese characters beside it flashing in the sky while I’m singing.

**How’s your Chinese?**

In Cantonese I can hail 截的士 for a cab ride. But everyone speaks English. In mainland China I’ve had to learn more. I know enough to greet people, make fun of myself, and make them laugh. Olivia, my assistant, goes with me when I do the big shows in China.

**Do you consider yourself an expat? What would it take for you to consider yourself one?**

I am for sure an expat in Hong Kong, which has a huge expat community. To be a resident in Hong Kong, you have to be there at least seven years.

**What’s the dating scene like in Hong Kong?**

There’s a huge expat community. In that respect, it can be a small city, like we all go to the same places. Dating-wise, there are plenty of young men who are driven. Everyone has a dream. I’ve never met a boring person in Hong Kong. You can do anything in Hong Kong. The party scene is great. You can go to bars at 7 a.m. You can party all night long and meet people. But it’s also very transient. I’m not single now, but it can be very lonely amid the thrill of all this. In Portland you can go anywhere and make a friend. In Hong Kong, you don’t know if it’s to help them with a contact or it’s genuine.

(Continued on page 76)
Creating Generations of Smiles

Family Dentistry

Dr. Nancy Sargent
Dr. Irina Babayan

are pleased to welcome new patients

251 U.S. Route 1, Falmouth, Maine 04105 (207) 781-4216

Professional In-Office and Take-Home Whitening
WWW.FORESIDEFAMILYDENTISTRY.COM

Tess Collins (continued from page 25)

What is your romantic situation?
I met my fiancé out there. He’s from London. He’s a tall, dark, and handsome pilot for Cathay Pacific. I met him in Wan Chai on a random Monday night. He’s cool, calm, and collected. I would want him to be my pilot, let’s put it that way, right? At first we thought we might get married in an English castle, but it’s going to be here on the Maine coast. I come here to get out of the pollution and get some clean air. I feel I can relax when I’m back here.

What’s the most recent time Sen. Collins saw you perform?
Christmas. She was singing along, too. We all gather around the piano with my grandparents and sing carols. [Before that] she came to see me at Pearl, in the Old Port.

Her signature colors are red and blue. What’s yours?
Black. It’s classy and sexy, right? But red is good luck in China. If you wear a red dress, it makes them very happy. Unless it’s the color of a business competitor.

You’ve performed at Pearl, The Big Easy … Where else?
Gingko Blue. I’ve sung down at The Landing at Pine Point. The Lubec Jazz Festival. I’ve performed a lot with Tony Boffa. At the Frog and Turtle in Westbrook, I sat in with him. That’s something great about Maine. You can go where someone’s performing and they’re all going to invite you up to sing.

Who’s your BFF from Maine who wants to know what you’re doing every waking moment?
Katie Tateishi, from Caribou. She’s come to see me twice in Hong Kong, once in Beijing.

It’s getting late. What’s your closing number?
It depends on the show. If it’s a listening audience, I’ll probably do a blues. Maybe “Love Me Like A Man.” It’s the story of a woman dating these different guys. It’s for someone to hear who will treat you like a princess, make you feel like the woman you are.

Worst song you’ve ever been asked to sing in China?
The one I dread hearing as a request? “My Heart Will Go On.” The Chinese love that song. The Titanic going down. I don’t know why.