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## Japanese Guitarist Tak Matsumoto Talks About Kansai Blues, His Signature Les Pauls and Bonnie Raitt

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By: Rick Landers

Guitarists around the world may want to pay attention to the Japanese band called B'z or its guitarist Tak Matsumoto, and maybe learn a few things about how to make their guitars wail and scream, whine and soar.

Master guitarist, Tak Matsumoto, and vocalist, Koshi Inaba, have shared the stage since 1988 as B'z and they've loaded up the charts with an amazing 46 hits. The duo has landed more consecutive #1 hit records on Japan's Oricon Singles Chart, than any other act. When B'z toured North America last year, they sold out all of their gigs.



Matsumoto has gained the attention of some of the world's top guitarists, sharing the stage with the likes of Steve Vai, Chad Smith and Jack Blades. And if you're into jazz, you've heard of Larry Carlton, who Tak joined in the studio to release their 2012 Grammy album, *Take Your Pick*, that won the Best Pop Instrumental Album award.

Tak's back on tour running solo in America in 2012.

*Guitar International* snagged an opportunity to speak with Mr. Takamoto before he hit the road to talk about his music, B'z, and his group of Signature Les Paul guitars.

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**Rick Landers:** You'll be headed out on an American tour next month. What earlier or newer music of yours would you suggest Americans listen to in order to get a feel for what they can expect from your upcoming gigs?

**Tak Matsumoto:** The show will be a mix of new and old, both Japanese and English. We just released an all English EP so please check it out.

**Rick:** "B'z" rocks and "Juice" is one of its hard-hitting tracks. I'm guessing this is going to be a high-energy tour for B'z. Any chance that you might extend the tour to include more American gigs? Any other tours planned?

**Tak Matsumoto:** Thank you so much. Unfortunately, we have no plan to extend the tour as of now. We're touring all over Japan next year for 25th anniversary of B'z, but I'm sure we'll be back in the US soon.

**Rick:** Over the years you've worked with Gibson on Signature guitars and I understand you have a new model? What features did you suggest for your new Signature model?

**Tak Matsumoto:** My model is very easy to play high position because of the double cutaway, and has the tone that supports various kinds of music. Also, it's not too heavy, so it's good for live performing. Gibson has released many of my signature models in Japan.

**Rick:** Are the pickups standard issue or did you have them tweaked to your preferences?



**Tak Matsumoto:** The pickups are the Burstbuckers.

**Rick:** How long did it take to get the new guitar issued, from the time Gibson approached you on its development? Did you come to the States or did you work from Japan on it with Gibson?

**Tak Matsumoto:** I do remember the time when they approached me in 1998. I couldn't believe it was true until they invited me to the Gibson factory in Nashville. They gave me a warm welcome and we discussed plans for my signature model there. My first signature Les Paul was issued a year later.

**Rick:** How did you and Larry Carlton get to know each other and did you learn anything from him that you've incorporated into your music or life?

**Tak Matsumoto:** I heard that Rick Gembar [Gibson Custom Shop] suggested to Larry that we perform together when he thought about doing something special for his Japanese fans. The first time we met was 2007 in Tokyo. We talked over lunch about what we could do. It took over a year to get started, but we won the Grammy as the result of the collaboration. Mr. Carlton taught me how to be calm and a gentleman.

**Rick:** Your guitar collection includes some superb vintage guitars, dating back to the 1930s. What vintage or classical guitars do you have in your collection and have you used them in performance or in the studio?

**Tak Matsumoto:** I have 1959 Les Paul standard, 1958, 1957, 1956 (P-90 pickups), a Les Paul Gold top, a 1954 and a 1962 Stratocaster, a 1952 Telecaster and so on.

**Rick:** Your guitar style has been called a mix of jazz, metal, ska and blues, specifically "Kansai Blues". I'm not familiar with Kansai, how does that differ from traditional blues?

**Tak Matsumoto:** I can't find the exact words to describe what the Kansai blues is, but I'm sure that the Japanese blues came from Kansai area. I came from Osaka, as well. I think it's like mixture of traditional blues and Japanese taste. Please listen to my solo album, *Strings Of My Soul*, if you'd like to feel the Kansai blues.

**Rick:** Most guitarists name legendary rock guitarists as their inspiration, but few name women guitarists. Have you found inspiration from any and what female guitarist would you most like to work with in the near future?

**Tak Matsumoto:** Bonnie Raitt. I believe she's the greatest female blues guitarist in the world.

**Rick:** I'm intrigued by B'z's vocalist, Koshi Inaba, who's got a degree in mathematics, who's worked with Steve Vai and has a vocal range of three and a half octaves. How did you two find each other and was it obvious from the beginning that the two of you should work together?

**Tak Matsumoto:** A producer introduced me to him when I looked for a singer for my own band. We've been sharing many experiences as B'z for 24 years. It must be fate.

**Rick:** What are some of the wildest, most unusual or funniest experiences you've had on stage?

**Tak Matsumoto:** That was more than 10 years ago at the Fukuoka Dome. I could hear Koshi's singing voice, but I couldn't see him on the stage. I asked him after the show what happened. He said that he fell off the stage. He didn't stop singing, however. He is a complete professional!

**Rick:** What challenges do you face fusing Western rock music with Oriental music and in a manner that the end result is melodically appealing?

**Tak Matsumoto:** I don't think how to do it, just create music the way I feel.

**Rick:** When trying to "fit" lyrics to a melody line, have you found that you like the lyrics or even a specific word so much that you rework the melody? If so, are you surprised where that kind direction that takes the song?

**Tak Matsumoto:** Yes, it happens and it's a nice surprise.

**Rick:** What motivated you to start your own House of Strings label and who are some of the artists on it?

**Tak Matsumoto:** The House Of Strings is a stringed instruments player's label. Not only for guitar players. I'd like to spread out instrumental music further, and also bring attention to the gifted young musicians.

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**Rick:** Now that you have B'z released, what other new projects are in the works?

**Tak Matsumoto:** We don't know specifically yet, but we'll be definitely be touring and making new music.