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Matsumoto says that his first gig, [backing up](#) singer Mari Hamada, was a "dream come true."

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Interview: Famous Firsts with B'z guitarist Tak Matsumoto

"The first guitar solo I learned was Smoke On The Water. I think it took more than a year."

[Joe Bossio](#) October 10, 2012, 20:05 GMT

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Music fans outside of Asia are just starting to discover the hard rock duo B'z, but they'll have a lot of catching up to do: Since 1988, guitarist Takahiro "Tak" Matsumoto and singer Koshi Inaba have sold a staggering 80 million copies of their 24 studio albums in Japan alone.

This past summer, Matsumoto was honored by Gibson with [the Tak Matsumoto Doublecut Custom Ebony model](#) to go with his numerous other Gibson and

Epiphone [signature](#) guitars. B'z just released their first English-language EP (titled B'z) and completed their maiden US tour. Just before performing at the Gibson Ampitheatre in Los Angeles, we caught up with Matsumoto to ask him about what we like to call Famous Firsts.

What was your first guitar, and how old were you when you got it?

"My first guitar was a [Les Paul](#) model, a Japanese brand, and I started to play when I was 15 years old. I tried to copy Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin and so on every day – the same as most high school boys."

What was the first band – or album – that made you want to be a guitarist?

"Deep Purple and Ritchie Blackmore. Made In Japan and Burn had a huge effect on me."

What was the first guitar solo you learned how to play? How long did it take you to play it "correctly"?

"The first guitar solo I learned was Smoke On The Water. I think it took more than a year. Even now I'm not sure if I'm playing it correctly!"

What was your first really good guitar and amp?

"I got a [Fender Stratocaster](#) when I was 17 years old. I regret that I sold it. My first good amp was a used [Marshall](#)."

What was the first band you were in?

"My first proper band was a hard, progressive-rock band. The keyboard player was really influenced by Rick Wakeman and wrote all original songs."



Singer Koshi Inaba on stage with Matsumoto. © Vermillion

What was the first song you wrote that you thought was great?

"I started writing songs when I was 17 years old – I've probably written more than 500 songs by now. I don't know which song I would consider great, but the first big hit was called Bad Communication. I remember that it didn't take long to write it. Sometimes a hit song is like that."

What was your first Les Paul that you bought? Did it change your playing style at all?

"I traded in the Fender Stratocaster for my first Gibson Les Paul when I was 19 years old. My playing got a lot harder because of the thick body and the humbucker pickups."

When was the first time you played to a big audience? What was that experience like?

"When I was 20 through 26 years old, I was a session player, so it wasn't with B'z. The first time I played to a big audience was as a support guitarist for Mari Hamada, a Japanese female rock singer, at the Budokan in 1985. It was a dream come true."

Who was the first guitar hero of yours that you got a chance to meet?

"I met Eddie Van Halen in 1999 during an interview and photo shoot for a Japanese guitar magazine. He invited me to a Van Halen show at the Budokan and let me watch their rehearsal before the show. He also warmly welcomed me to his house and the 5150 studio later on. He was a truly wonderful person,



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