

JAPAN EXPO in PARIS



Naoto Hirooka alongside a mannequin wearing clothes in the punk-style line he made for his fashion show at the Japan Expo in Paris.

The 12th Japan Expo was held in Paris between June 30 and July 3. This expo introducing Japanese popular culture drew a record crowd of 200,000 people, attracted by various events such as *cosplay*, karaoke concerts, video game tournaments, and more than 150 *dojinshi* (self-published magazine) stands.

One event that drew a particularly big response was a fashion show featuring Naoto Hirooka, the charismatic designer of the h.NAOTO fashion label, who was invited from Japan as a guest of honor. The venue was packed with about 2,000 Parisians, mostly in their teens, who were thrilled by the “permanent item” collection, which featured twenty-three pieces, including several new works, in the three themes of Punk, Gothic and Lolita.

“I’ve done shows in LA and Baltimore in the United States, but this is my first show in Europe. It has been a real honor. Unlike Japan, where people can



French youths in cosplay outfits attend the Japan Expo in Paris, June 30.

AP/WIDE

buy my clothes like it's no big deal, the energy from people wanting to get hold of my clothes was really something else. It was an electrifying experience."

The h.NAOTO label started out with Punk fashion designs in 2000, but soon fused the Gothic and Lolita fashion styles to produce the GothLoli style, which was an instant hit. Hirooka describes GothLoli as "a fashion that embraces darkness, even within an image of wholesomeness and purity."

The rising popularity of GothLoli accelerated as it became a favorite with *Vijual-kei* (visual style) musicians who wore it on stage when they performed, and the enthusiasm soon took off overseas, helped by the popularity of Japanese *anime*. Amy Lee, the vocalist of the American rock band Evanescence,

asked Hirooka to make her outfit for the 2004 Grammy Awards.

Yoshiki and Sugizo of the popular Japanese rock band X Japan, who attended a chat show at the Japan Expo a day before their concert in Paris, wore h.NAOTO clothes at their concert. In 2010, Yoshiki and Hirooka collaborated to launch the "NY" fashion label in the United States.

"I want to create clothes that people in their thirties and forties can feel comfortable wearing, by being even fussier about materials and stitching, but without changing the h.NAOTO image. And one day I'd like to showcase my collection at the Paris Fashion Week. When I do, it would be great if Yoshiki from X Japan could play piano..."

