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Fashion Designer Naoto Hirooka to be Guest at Otakekon® 2010

Baltimore, MD (April 21, 2010) – The avant-garde Japanese fashion designer Naoto Hirooka, better known as h.Naoto, will be a guest at this year's Otakekon. In addition to routine guest appearances and a showcase booth in the exhibit hall, the avant-garde fashion icon, whose signature look borrows from punk, gothic Lolita, and visual kei influences, will present a fashion show as part of this year's event. The show will feature Otakekon members as models, wearing h.Naoto's signature designs. Registered members may apply to participate; see the Otakekon website for more details

Jim Vowles, head of Otakekon Guess and Press Relations, said, "If you'd told me a few years ago that we'd feature an avant-garde fashion mogul at Otakekon -- here in Baltimore where we have a contest for the biggest beehive hairdo every year -- I'd have laughed. But that dark, elegant look has been part of the J-Rock scene for some time, and gothic fashion has been visible at Otakekon for several years. And previous fan-run shows have been pretty big draws."

Hirooka was born in Hyogo Prefecture in Japan. After graduating from Bunka Fashion College, he took a position at S-inc Co. Ltd. in 1999. In 2000, he debuted his own brand, h.NAOTO, which drew inspiration from extreme punk styles. He then expanded his line to incorporate fashions from such Japanese subcultures as Gothic Lolita and visual kei. His original collections earned him praise from critics in Japan, as well as from international artists and musicians.

Later, the h.NAOTO collection added the character-based lines CHANNEL H and HANGRY&ANGRY, designed to appeal to the subcultures of "cute" anime and video-game cosplay. In 2005, he refined his designs once again, with a more evolved collection of fashion and art, hEAVEN.

Vowles said, "By the craziest coincidence, the Otakekon booth at Tokyo Anime Faire was right next to the HANGRY & ANGRY merchandise booth, so our neighbors were giant plushie goth kitties, who periodically came over to visit. It's a funny old world. "

Always eager to explore new ideas, Hirooka has also produced specialty brands such as the men's shop "h," which offers street-based designs inspired by bikers, workers, and the military; and the shop "8club," which focuses on sexiness and cuteness. No doubt, the brand h.NAOTO will continue to diversify and deepen, appealing to a variety of global subcultures.

Otakekon 2010 will be held July 30 – August 1 at the Baltimore Convention Center in Baltimore, Maryland.

ABOUT OTAKON AND OTAKORP, INC.: Now entering its seventeenth year, Otakon is an annual celebration of Japanese and East Asian popular culture, and also one of the largest gatherings of fans in the United States. Otakon celebrates popular culture as a gateway to deeper understanding of Asian culture, and has grown along with the enthusiasm for anime, manga, video games, and music from the Far East. Since 1999, Otakon has been held in Baltimore, Maryland; currently, Otakon is one of Baltimore's few large, city-wide events, drawing over 25,000 individual members for three days each year (for a paid attendance of over 70,000 "turnstile" attendees). Otakon is a membership-based convention sponsored by Otakorp, Inc., a Pennsylvania-based, 501(c)3 educational non-profit whose mission is to promote the appreciation of Asian culture, primarily through its media and entertainment. Otakorp, Inc. is directed by an all-volunteer, unpaid staff – we are run by fans, for fans.

For more information about Otakorp, Inc., see <http://www.otakon.com/otakorp/index.asp>

For more information and the latest news on Otakon 2010, see <http://www.otakon.com/>