This year’s series will present screenings of highly acclaimed contemporary films from some of the best Japanese directors working today. A diverse sampling of styles and narratives, the series will include Negishi Kichitaro's nostalgia filled drama film *Dog in a Sidecar* (2008); Yamashita Nobuhiro’s quirky black comedy *Matsugane Potshot Affair* (2006); Uchida Kenji’s feature debut, the madcap “romantic” comedy *A Stranger of Mine* (2004); and finally Toyoda Toshiaki’s dark family drama, *Hanging Garden* (2005).

**Dog in a Sidecar**  
*Saidokaa ni inu* (サイドカーに犬)  
2008  
94 minutes  
**Director:** Negishi Kichitaro

**Synopsis:**

Kaoru is 30 years old, single, and lives in Tokyo. Her younger brother, Toru, is getting married. After an uneasy conversation with him, she decides to skip work and goes fishing for the day. While helping a little girl bait her hook, she is reminded of her own childhood and a special relationship she forms with a young woman named Yoko.

One day, Kaoru’s mother simply leaves home. Days or weeks later, a Yoko shows up at their apartment and makes herself right at home. Her father’s mistress, Yoko is introduced to Kaoru and her brother as the nanny and cook. Meanwhile, Kaoru's father, a failing used car salesman, carries on as before, unfazed by his wife's sudden departure.

The film centers on the unusual bond formed between the carefree Yoko and quiet and introverted Kaoru during summer vacation. Yoko pushes Kaoru out of her shell and circumscribed life with late night excursions, trips to the ocean, and belatedly learning how to ride a bicycle.

One day, Kaoru’s mother, Yoshiko returns and is outraged that Yoko is in her house. The two women struggle and Yoko knocks Yoshiko out. In the divorce settlement, Kaoru’s mother takes her to Yamagata, while her brother stays with her father.

Back in the present-day, Toru tells Kaoru that Yoko is living very close to by; he has seen Yoko's bicycle in the neighborhood. Kaoru remembers how Yoko prided herself on bicycling every day and as a sign of the effect Yoko has had on her life, Kaoru remarks that she now cycles every day, too.
About the Director: Kichitaro Negishi

Like other filmmakers of his generation, Kichitaro Negshi started his career directing Roman Porno film for Nikkatsu. He received wider recognition for Enrai (Distant Thunder, 1981), which won him Best Director at 1982 Yokohama Film Festival. Negshi was energetically producing films until the late 1980s, however; over the next 15 years, his focus moved toward to music videos and has only filmed sporadically before his return in 2004. Negshi also won Best Director at 2009 Montreal World Film Festival with Villon’s Wife (2009).

About the Leading Actor: Yuko Takeuchi (Yoko)

Yuko Takeuchi became a common face on TV with NHK’s morning drama series Asuka in 1999. Since then, she has featured in numerous TV drama series and films. By starring Dog in a Sidecar in 2007, Takeuchi received critical acclaim and won four Best Actress awards, including the 2007 Kinema Jumpo Best Ten. She has been compared to Audrey Hepburn by the director Kichitaro Negishi. She also made her appearance in ABC’s (USA) FlashForward (2009).

The Matsugane Potshot Affair

Matsugane ransha jiken（松ヶ根乱射事件）
2006
112 minutes

Director: Yamashita Nobuhiro

Synopsis:

A boy finds a woman’s body on a snowy road, the victim of a hit-and-run. Kotaro, one of two police officers in tiny Matsugane, heads out to investigate. Kotaro’s twin brother Hikaru, meanwhile, is shown in front of the house, trying to hide the telltale dent in his car. As Kotaro and the doctors talk at the side of the naked body in the morgue, it begins to blink; this woman Miyuki, is alive! Kotaro interviews her to try to solve the mystery; particularly, why does she have an icepick stab wound through her hand? After her release, she walks home to her lover Nishioka, who seems less than amazed at her ordeal.

The film centers around the lives of the two brothers: Hikaru tries to conceal the dent in his truck and is then blackmailed by Miyuki and Nishioka into helping them find a place to live and retrieve a bag of gold submerged in a frozen lake. A human head just happens to have been buried along with the gold.

Kotaro is unceasingly loyalty to his brother, though racked by doubts of solving the town of Matsugane’s biggest ever crime, all the while obsessing over a rat infestation at the police house.

Will the brothers be able to find a solution to their predicament?

About the Director: Nobuhiro Yamashita

Nobuhiro Yamashita, born in 1976 in Aichi Prefecture, started his filming career in high school and later attended
Osaka University of Arts. His first feature-length and graduation film *Hazy Life* (1999), won the Off Theatre Competition Grand Prize at the 2000 Yubari International Fantastic Film Festival. He also won Best Director at the 32nd Hoichi Film Award in 2007 for *A Gentle Breeze in the Village* (2007) and *The Matsugane Potshot Affair* (2007). His most recent work is *Kueki Ressha*, which will be theatrically released in July, 2012.

**About the Leading Actor: Hirofumi Arai (Kotaro Suzuki)**


**A Stranger of Mine**  
*Unmei ja nai hito (運命じゃない人)*  
2004  
98 minutes  
**Director: Uchida Kenji**

*Synopsis:*

Maki is a lonely young woman who has just broken up with her fiancé and has no place to live. As she sits alone with her luggage at a restaurant, a gentleman at the next table, Kanda, invites her to join him and his friend, Miyata, for dinner. Kanda is a private investigator and Miyata is a quiet office worker whose girlfriend, Ayumi, left him shortly after they moved into an expensive apartment he bought for them.

Kanda hounds Miyata about his lack of action to get his love life back on track and schemes to invite Maki to sit with them, while he excuses himself to use the bathroom and never returns. Since she has no place to stay that night, Takeshi asks her over to his place. Just as he is preparing a bath for Maki, Ayumi herself suddenly appears to pick up her clothes.

Accusing Ayumi of being selfish, Maki runs out of the apartment and Takeshi, leaving Ayumi there, runs after her. Not believing his declaration of affection, Maki hops onto a cab, but Takeshi runs after her, stopping the cab and asking for her phone number. Receiving it, he dances a bit in the street.

Matters, however, are much more complicated than Takeshi thinks, involving a con artist, a yakuza boss, and a briefcase. The film returns to the beginning of the story multiple times, each time telling it from a different point-of-view, revealing more complex layers, and more unexpected surprises.

**About the Director: Kenji Uchida**

Receiving scholarship from PFF, his theatrical feature film debut, *A Stranger of Mine* (2005) won four awards at the Cannes Film Festival. His latest film will be showing in theaters in September, 2012.

**About the Leading Actor: Yasuhi Nakamura (Takeshi Miyata)**

A graduate of Musashino Art University in Tokyo, Yasuhi Nakamura attracted wide praise for his starring role in *A Stranger of Mine* in 2005. He now works mainly in TV dramas and stage acting. Nakamura’s other films include *Happy Flight* (2008) and *Cast Me If You Can* (2010).

**Hanging Garden**

*Kuchu Teien* (空中庭園)

2005

113 minutes

**Director: Toyoda Toshiaki**

**Synopsis:**

Living in a suburban part of present-day Japan, the Kyobashi family looks just like a normal, happy family, but the reality is quite different. The family rule is that no one has any secrets. The facade slowly begins to crack.

The father, Takashi, is a regular salaried worker, chasing one job after another to make ends meet. Eriko, the mother, works to supplement their income. Eriko and Takashi haven't had sex for five years. He wants to but she is not interested. Takashi secretly has two mistresses both of whom dominate him emotionally and physically. Mana, the daughter, is a high-school student, yet secretly she doesn't attend classes anymore. She spends her time hanging around a shopping center, going to love hotels with her boyfriends, and posing for idol magazines. The youngest child, Ko, escapes into his computer world, but soon realizes that something is wrong with his family.

Hearing from his sister that love hotels have no windows, Ko has his tutor (who also, unknown to everyone, is one of the father's mistresses) takes him there to see. Eriko realizes that her family is falling apart but still tries to go along with a smile as if everything is normal.

Unknown to the rest of the family, Eriko has been suffering from depression for most of her life. Eriko's mother and Eriko have had a rocky relationship since Eriko was a child. As the veneer of the happy family falls apart, Eriko attempts to come to grips with her depression. Mana, Ko, and Takashi realize that love is what holds a family together. The film ends with Eriko opening the door to let her family in . . . .

**About the Director: Toshiaki Toyoda**

Born in Osaka in 1969, Toyoda made his debut as a co-scriptwriter for Junji Sakamoto's *Ote* (1991), which he based on his experiences at an association of talented elite young Shogi players from 9 to 17 years old. His director debut

**About the Leading Actor: Kyoko Koizumi (Eriko Kyobashi)**

Koizumi began her career as a singer. She had singles reach the Top ten for 12 consecutive years between 1983 and 1994. Koizumi has since appeared in numerous TV dramas and movies. Koizumi was given the Best Actress award at the 1989 Yokohama Film Festival for her work in the film *Kaitō Ruby* and won Best Actress at the 2001 Hoichi Film Award with her appearance in *Kaza Hana* (2000). Her recent filmography include *What the Snow Brings* (2005), *Tokyo Sonata* (2008), and *Everyday Mum* (2011).