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Losing Ground: Microcosm Of A Greed Culture

By Prairie Miller
 WBAI Arts Magazine



With the steady erosion in American culture of a vibrant connection to family, community and inherent economic wellbeing, the yearning for that human bond following the attraction of churches and moviehouses, may very well be the neighborhood bar. Add to that the type of local Vegas watering hole as in the film *Losing Ground*, where gambling machines are legal, and those class insecurities and economic anxieties are ripe for proliferation.

Writer/director Bryan Wizemann, in adapting his story from stage to screen, has much to put on the table in *Losing Ground*, and with very little to work with in terms of concrete elements. The setting is a dimly lit, fairly seedy bar where the complimentary drinks and customer quarters flow readily, and only once is there a change of setting to the basement below.

And what at first presents itself with all the static and confined trappings of a stage, eventually surprises and fascinates as psyches collide and explode, and a collective darker side to these seemingly fractured and disconnected characters unravels in myriad ways. Only the money sustains a muted but relentless, dreaded presence, like a social toxin settling over and cementing itself to everything in its path.

Kieran (Kendall Pigg), is the sullen, laconic bartender, somewhat of a weary observer of the human condition as he patiently tends to, coddles or scolds his regulars dropping in, like needy and oftentimes irritating children. In Kieran's bar, gambling, not the free alcohol, is the addiction and highly lethal cocktail of choice. Numerous narrative strands mysteriously and gracefully intertwine, trapping these compulsive, desperate characters in their tangled web. And always with a skillfully established sense of anticipation and emotional intrigue, as these barely aware captives pound the video poker machines at the bar, preying on one another when necessary to manipulate them into roles as accessories to their winner fantasies. Shame here is clearly a luxury for those without an all-consuming addiction.

Losing Ground, with its muted but potentially charged minimalism, has much to convey about the ways in which the economic and emotional uncertainties of a greed culture steeped in narcissistic myth and fantasy, cripple people's lives emotionally. Here is a spontaneously imparted microcosm, whether intentional or not, of capitalism's wasteland, and the trails of destroyed bodies and souls it leaves in its wake.

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Losing Ground has a limited release at the Two Boots Pioneer Theater in NYC. See www.losingground.net for more information.

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