

**OFFICIAL SELECTION**

CINEQUEST Film Festival 2005 – DXD Dramatic Competition  
CINEVEGAS Film Festival 2005 – Diamond Discovery Competition  
SANTA FE Film Festival 2005 – Southwest Showcase Competition

**PRODUCTION NOTES**

Running Time: 90 minutes | Rating: TBD  
Photos and production notes are available at [www.losingground.net](http://www.losingground.net)

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a new film  
written & directed by **bryan wizemann**



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**LOSINGGROUND**

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## REVIEWS

"A fine, stark, totally uncompromised drama."

*Matt Zoller Seitz, **NYP**ress*

"...the downbeat ensemble drama impresses with its gritty realism, low-key dramatic focus and honed performances. ...Mercifully, script refrains from spelling out the pathos already quite evident in the setting and the characters' faces. A few terse back stories emerge but, more often, dialogue is credibly focused on strained pleasantries, leaving tragedy easy to read. Performers, all retained from the original stage production, are uniformly excellent. Their absorbing turns and discreet direction keep the bleak tale from growing too uneventful or monotonous."

*Dennis Harvey, **Variety***

(Four Stars)

"LOSING **GROUND**, like its characters, is in no hurry to artificially define where its headed. –There's not a bad performance in the lot, each fulfilling a sadness and a greater sense of danger that comes with satisfying their craving. ...cinematographer Mark Schwartzbard confines the shadows like a trap to which these people and the audience have no escape."

*Erik Childress, **eFilmCritic.com***

(Four Stars)

"LOSING **GROUND** makes its greatest connection in knowing us just as much as we know these characters. It is fascinating filmmaking that gets to the core of humanity, scrapes out even the most bottommost parts of it, and holds it up to examine it."

*Rory L. Aronsky, **FILM THREAT***

"The gamblers utter their dialogue with a realistic sense of desperation... his characters seem trapped under microscope slides on the screen. Despite not having a formal narrative line, Wizemann's screenplay peppers the journey with subtle road signs that clue us into the characters' backstory, flaws and motivation. He is ably supported by his actors, each of whom turn in fine work. What makes LOSING **GROUND** compelling is how Wizemann subtly transcends the clichés of the addiction film. It leads us down a familiar path, but its power is in the journey, not the destination. It is well worth seeing if given the chance."

*Odie Henderson, **Cinemaniac's Corner***

"Bryan Wizemann brings his acclaimed New York play to the screen in a stunning array of drama and performances worthy of Eugene O'Neill. Taking place in real time and restrained spaces, LOSING **GROUND** brings you so close to the characters that their troubles and victories resonate all the more powerfully with audiences. With sobering patience and insight, Wizemann's story examines the lives of characters rendered complex and all too human."

*Fernando F. Croce, **Cinequest***

## **CAST**

Michelle  
Kieran  
James  
Marty  
Reagan  
Turner  
Paul

Eileen O'Connell  
Kendall Pigg  
Matthew Mark Meyer  
Monique Vukovic  
Rhonda Keyser  
John Good  
Colm Byrne

## **PRODUCTION CREW**

Written, Produced, & Directed by  
Director of Photography  
Editor  
Producer

Bryan Wizemann  
Mark Schwartzbard  
Brad Studstrup  
Julian Coutts

First Camera Operator  
Guest Camera Operator  
Guest Camera Operator  
Gaffer  
Key Grip  
Pre-Rig Gaffer  
Assistant Camera

George Lyon  
John Schwartz  
Rufus Standefer  
Tevo Diaz  
Paola Cantoni  
James Harker  
Charles Olsky

Production Designer  
First Assistant Director  
Second Assistant Director  
Script Supervisor  
Sound Editor/Re-Recording Mixer  
Location Sound  
Location Sound  
Additional Location Sound  
Boom Operator  
Additional Boom Operator  
Production Assistant  
Production Assistant  
Featuring The Music of

Gaylia Wagner  
Michelle Markham  
Dan Nikkel  
John Kahoun  
Brian Bowles M.P.S.E.  
Shane Stanfield  
Steffen Wild  
Shandi Quildon  
Gabriel Sanders  
Rob Huntoon  
Matt Marlin  
Cameron Yates  
Morton Feldman  
Performed by The FLUX Quartet  
Trevor DeClerq  
Alan Wizemann  
Joe Gawler, Technicolor NY  
Hit and Run Productions

Original Score  
Still photography & Title Design  
Colorist  
Equipment House

## **ABOUT THE FILM**

Adapted from the critically acclaimed New York stage play presented by Tom Noonan, **LOSING GROUND** unfolds in real-time over a single night in a Las Vegas video-poker bar where seven people come in, interact, strike up friendships of convenience, win, lose, and go home.

Bryan Wizemann's haunting and elegiac feature film debut is a contemporary portrait of ritual and superstition, intimacy and estrangement. In direct contrast with the current zeitgeist of a Las Vegas myth, **LOSING GROUND** is a personal and closely observed work on the addictions of human nature.

## **FULL SYNOPSIS**

**LOSING GROUND** opens inside one of the many video poker bars in Las Vegas, and for the next ninety minutes of real time depiction, never leaves. By restricting the viewer to the enclosures of the bar with the characters often stuck to their seats, the claustrophobia and desperation slowly loom. The dialogue is completely scripted, acute, quiet and underwritten; its strengths lie in its subtleties. The pace is measured, almost cautious in its opening. The story takes its time to unfold naturally, bringing in each character of the ensemble before it explores and develops each departure. It eschews traditional narrative development in favor of a more patient and organic film experience.

With limited action and several loosely interwoven plots, elements of story seep in. We open with the bartender Kieran (Kendall Pigg) re-opening a bar that never really closes, a long slow routine. Michelle (Eileen O'Connell) arrives mad at having been kept waiting, but remains excited about her premonition of hitting four aces. It's clear these two have dealt with each other before. Slowly, the others come. There is James (Matthew Mark Meyer), broken-armed and in the midst of a new relationship where it seems Kieran was once before. James talks before he thinks, and it is all Kieran can do to lay off him. To help matters, Reagan (Rhonda Keyser), the new girl in James's life, still plays the fence between these two, enjoying the spotlight that indecision brings. A guy comes in but is thrown out because he's taking up a machine and not playing it. Marty (Monique Vukovic) who wanted that machine for herself, is a mother who goes on about her kid starting college and provides a convenient friend to Michelle: they share advice, some bathroom privacy and some crystal-meth. Turner (John Good) donning a cowboy hat arrives later, and not only finds some luck but gives Michelle renewed hope, someone to latch onto to keep going. The poker playing is constant, at least until the money runs out, and amidst the desperate tedium small moments ebb and flow, small victories are won and lost.

In direct contrast with the current zeitgeist of the Las Vegas myth, **LOSING GROUND** is a personal and closely observed work on the addictions of human nature, the recurrent present of past decisions, and the self-created purgatories that often define a life. Bryan Wizemann's haunting and elegiac feature film debut is a contemporary portrait of ritual and superstition, intimacy and estrangement. The realism that **LOSING GROUND** achieves is significant. It offers no easy answers and no real resolution. It is intentionally commonplace, intentionally implicit. There are no guns introduced, no deaths at its end, and what we are left with is a contemporary drama that never indulges in excess. It is the gradual revealing of character and the gradual fall of the arc that become so compelling.

## **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

**LOSING GROUND** first premiered as a full-length stage play presented by Tom Noonan at the Paradise Theater in New York City. After critical acclaim and continued support, the play was adapted into an independent feature film using the original New York cast. Written expressly for the actors who appear in the film, the cast features accomplished performers from the New York Theater scene. It is our hope that this film will give them a deserved wider audience.

The film adaptation of **LOSING GROUND** was completed in just eleven days with a paid cast and crew. Filmed entirely on location at the Gate, this local Brooklyn bar was made to look like so many found in Vegas, which included mounting actual bar-top video poker machines. The shoot had demanding time constraints as well: the crew would arrive at 4am when the bar closed down, film what it could, and clear out every day by 4pm to let the place open for business.

This film is sure to elicit consideration over how the production manipulated digital video to achieve the softness and depth of film. Lit incredibly dark, the very mood of the piece is mimicked in the hidden corners of this dank and empty environ. The sound design is also minimal: tractor-trailer trucks and traffic whirl past outside; empty pipes and an occasional song on the jukebox provide the naked underscoring to the emotional pull downward.

With an experienced crew led by the cinematographer Mark Schwartzbard (**GARMENTO**, **ROAD MOVIE**), principal photography was completed in Brooklyn, New York in October of 2003. A continuous two-camera shoot, the first camera operator George Lyon along with two guest operators tested the limits of Sony's PD-150. Following the model developed by Ellen Kuras on **PERSONAL VELOCITY**, the interior was fogged to help diffuse the light and soften the texture of the DVcam footage. The production designer Gaylia Wagner managed to transform an old staple of the Brooklyn bar scene into a dingier version of itself, one that mirrored the desolate interiors so often encountered in Vegas.

**LOSING GROUND** was edited by the motion picture editor Brad Studstrup (**WANG DANG**) using Final Cut Pro HD systems. Brian Bowles (**FOG OF WAR**, **DIRT**) of C.A. Sound served as the post-production sound editor and re-recording mixer, and Joe Gawler (**PERSONAL VELOCITY**) served as the colorist, who along with Technicolor New York helped bring the film to completion.

## **THE PERFORMANCES**

Eileen O'Connell, in a very nuanced role, shines as the fragile Michelle, who often teeters at the brink of her own demise, and unfortunately blames herself for events (somewhat) out of her control. Kendall Pigg, as the bartender Kieran, holds down the fort in a considered and stoic manner, an attitude that hints at his resignation over this routine. Matthew Mark Meyer plays James, and is able to acquit both his ignorance and quick temper with sincerity, and as his new girlfriend Reagan, Rhonda Keyser provides him with appropriate aggravation and affection. Monique Vukovic becomes a convenient friend to Michelle in the character Marty, and something always seems to simmer underneath her apathy. At the film's conclusion, Marty envelops her monologue of loss so deeply that one can't help but be overcome at its conclusion. John Good gives the smaller role of Turner an air of mystery and subtle complexity, even at the point when that complexity becomes calculating and dark.

## **ABOUT THE CAST**

**Eileen O'Connell** (MICHELLE) most recently starred in Colm Byrne's HIMSELF at the DR2 Theater, as Fawn in WHAT THE HELL'S YOUR PROBLEM, as Chrissy in the BOOM BOOM ROOM at Todo Con Nada Show World and as Eve in THE DANUBE at Playwrights Horizons. Eileen is a graduate of NYU Tisch School of the Arts.

**Kendall Pigg** (KIERAN) is a member of the Paradise Theater Company and recently played Erno in Tom Noonan's WHAT THE HELL'S YOUR PROBLEM. His favorite roles in recent memory include Medvedenko in THE SEAGULL at the Trilogy Theater, Johnny in A HATFUL OF RAIN at Raw Space, and Michael in D.A.G. Burgos' FAMILY LINEN.

**Mark Meyer** (JAMES) graduated from NYU Tisch School of the Arts and can soon be seen in THE ORANGEPAPERS, a new Film Noir shot entirely on location in both New York and in Austria directed by Joachim Krenn and Gerhard Fillei.

**Monique Vukovic** (MARTY) is a graduate of the National Shakespeare Conservatory, and was the understudy for Holly Hunter in Beth Henley's IMPOSSIBLE MARRIAGE at the Roundabout Theatre. After working with the Jean Cocteau Rep in numerous productions including THE CHERRY ORCHARD, MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING, and THE IDIOT, she played the title role in their production of IPHIGENEIA AT AULIS. She worked with Moonwork Productions in HAMLET (Hamlet), ROMEO & JULIET (Juliet), and THE DIVINERS (Jennie Mae). She recently played Vandy in Jay DiPietro's PETER AND VANDY, Linda in Michael Knowles' ROOM 314, Connie in Joyce Storey's CAGED at The Mint Theater and has performed at La Mama, etc., The Kitchen, and The New Jersey Shakespeare Festival.

**Rhonda Keyser** (REAGAN) directed and starred in AN UNPREDICTABLE THING (Solange Productions), a short film that premiered last year at The Williamsburg Brooklyn Film Festival and continues to screen at festivals around the country. Written as a stage monologue for Keyser, it was adapted from Tom Noonan's WHEN WE FALL (Paradise Theater, 1999). She has recently acted in several independent films, has performed on the regional stage in a variety of roles, and played Lanie in Lee Blessing's TWO ROOMS in theatre festivals in Hungary and Romania.

**John Good** (TURNER) has appeared in WHAT THE HELL'S YOUR PROBLEM, ROOM 314, and also in WAITING and WAKE UP AND GO TO SLEEP. Regional credits include SOMEONE WHO'LL WATCH OVER ME and ABUNDANCE.

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

**Bryan Wizemann** (writer/producer/director) is a graduate of Cornell University in philosophy with a concentration in film. Initially a writer of dramatic monologues, Bryan developed his first play DAYLIGHT with the dramatist Carey Harrison. His senior thesis film, a dark reinterpretation of the children's story BUTTON SOUP, screened at the Johnson Museum of Art and at Cinema Village New York. He wrote and directed the experimental student feature film SENSE, which participated in the 1998 IFFM at the Angelika Film Centre.

After having studied with the writer/director Tom Noonan at New York's Paradise Theater, Bryan wrote and directed the full-length play LOSING **GROUND**. With Tom Noonan serving as the producer, the play had a four-week run in the spring of 2003. He later directed Rhonda Keyser in his original monologue LOOKING FOR A SKY BLUE HAT, which was featured in the theatrical production MOUTHPIECES. Bryan Wizemann is the author of a collection of dramatic monologues, two stage plays, and five screenplays. He is also the director and founder of Ballast Films, an independent film production company in Brooklyn.

## FILMOGRAPHY

- |                        |                               |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| - Button Soup          | 16mm b&w sepia, 14min. - 1995 |
| - Sense                | 16mm color, 85min. - 1998     |
| - LOSING <b>GROUND</b> | DVCam color, 90min. - 2004    |

## AUTHORSHIP

- |                        |                              |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| - Genuine Bricks       | Screenplay - 1994            |
| - Daylight             | Stage Play - 1995            |
| - Sense                | Screenplay - 1997            |
| - The Weakest Fish     | Screenplay - 2001            |
| - LOSING <b>GROUND</b> | Stage Play/Screenplay - 2003 |
| - An Entire Body       | Screenplay - 2005            |

**Mark Schwartzbard** (director of photography) studied film at Ithaca College, where his junior year film was a Regional Finalist in the 23rd Student Academy Awards. His cinematography credits include two narrative feature films, (most recently GARMENTO, a comedy that played in limited release around the country) one documentary feature (on the verge of completion at this writing) and a healthy pile of shorts.

Several short films he's shot for himself have played and won awards at film festivals around the country, including Best of Show awards at the Rosebud Awards and the Ohio Independent Film Festival in 1996, the Personal Expression Award at 1996 Tacoma Tortured Artists Film Festival, the Lagniappe Award at 1996 New Orleans Film and Video Festival, and both the Screenwriting Award and second place, Experimental category, in the 1996 Empire State Exhibitions. His work has also been screened at the Cocoran Gallery in Washington, DC and the Walters Gallery in Baltimore, MD. When not shooting, Mark has worked for the last several years as a camera assistant on feature films, television series, and commercial work. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

**Brad Studstrup** (editor) cut Tom Noonan's WANG DANG (The Hamptons) and Lawrence Levine's TERRITORY (Cinequest and Durango). In Bryan Wizemann's LOSING **GROUND**, Brad was especially interested in the respiration of the film, creating space for resonance. When he's not editing, Studstrup teaches at a Manhattan-based film-editing workshop. He is a graduate of the fiction-writing program at Brown.