

EZELL

BALLAD OF A LAND MAN

A PARABLE OF DOMINATION + RESILIENCE
FROM THE FOOTHILLS OF APPALACHIA

Clear Creek
creative

INDIGENOUS HONORING

We acknowledge the privilege and complexity of living and working at Clear Creek in the Kentucky foothills of the Appalachian Mountains which we understand to be the traditional lands of Cherokee, Shawnee and other peoples indigenous to this place. We strive to be good stewards of the lands and to resolve the legacies of oppression and domination that have come before and persist today. We offer the experience of Ezell with a humble, healing spirit and in recognition of all those who have come before and are yet to come in this place and in all the places we visit.



INTENTION

The development and sharing of this theatrical work is an attempt to make plain and disrupt domination — to reveal the patterns of domination behavior within this character Ezell, within his relationship to others and the land, within his livelihoods and his ways of being, within his ancestry and his belief system. It is meant for everyone who witnesses it as a motivation to continue — or an invitation to begin — the work of discovering and disrupting domination within and around themselves and to do so as an act of love and liberation.

THE STORY

Ezell: Ballad of a Land Man is an environmental, cultural and spiritual parable derived from living in the foothills of Appalachia, one man among many seeking to make sense of the time, place and condition in which we live. In the story, **Ezell's** choices, traumas, ancestors and more intersect with themes of domination and resilience as he seeks to take advantage of an anticipated fracking boom and the opportunity to reconnect with the people and land of his raising.

ORIGIN

The threat of another century of fossil fuel extraction in Appalachia arrived directly on our doorstep when a company land man arrived at Clear Creek offering a lease for mineral rights to the lands that we and many others call home. Land men—essentially hired speculators for the oil & gas industry—were making a hard push to get in early on the anticipated expansion of oil & gas fracking into the Rogersville Shale, a geologic formation that crosses from West Virginia into East Kentucky through what has long been called “coal country.”

Several years later, that push has come to shove in a region where many are desperate to rekindle coal or replace it with a kindred economic driver and power source. Upstream from Kentucky along the Ohio River between Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia, an industrial mega-complex known as the Appalachian Storage Hub is being promoted with the stated goal of matching the Gulf Coast’s capacity for processing, storing and delivering fossil fuels and extraction waste generated from fracking throughout the region.

As fires burn, islands submerge, storms grow more forceful and substantially shifting seasonal patterns make the effects of climate change ever more real around the world, there are more and more of us who are manifesting another way forward, making another world possible. The character and story of **Ezell** was born within this global movement, one more localized element of resistance & resilience to inspire and activate the just transition away from fossil fuels, away from domination of all kinds and into a future powered by renewable energy and our evolving capacity to live in harmony with nature and with one another.





Erica Chambers

THEMES

Ezell is in part a study of domination in the wide range of its prominent and more subtle forms — domination between a man and the land, between a man and other people, between a man and himself. It is in part a story about how climate change, the extractive resource industry and intergenerational trauma impact the choices and decisions of a man and the land he would like to call home. It is in part a ceremony that calls to our desire for connection and belonging, that reveres nature and binds us intimately within her, that invokes the resilience, love and lessons of our ancestors and generations yet to come.

OUTCOMES

Our intention is that the creation, development and sharing of the **Ezell** experience will support ourselves, our partners, our audiences and many others by extension to:

- Disrupt patterns of domination and oppression within ourselves, our relationships, our communities, lands and society.
- Heal what needs healing within each of us and among all of us.
- Activate our collective work for renewable energy, clean water, abundant healthy food and ways of living in greater harmony with nature and one another.
- Inspire us through greater awareness of our shared humanity, common cause and interdependent liberation.

We're excited to partner with our host teams in meeting these outcomes as well as other intentions that may be tailored to the communities we visit.

EZELL'S EVOLUTION



Clear Creek hosts an extensive cross-regional exchange & performance series with artist-activists working to address issues of land, climate, extraction and culture on the Gulf Coast and in Appalachia.

The character of Ezell emerges & is informed by our direct interactions with the Land Man as we prepare for a 2nd iteration of Land, Water, Food Story supported by a Partners in Action grant from Alternate ROOTS.



A Clear Creek community ensemble develops & tours Where's That Power Gonna Come From? across KY to support community organizing in relation to the fracking threat and the vision for renewable energy alternatives.

We use Artistic Assistance from Alternate ROOTS and a 4-week residency at Double Edge Theater's Immersion Lab to begin creating a full-length Ezell production.



2014

2015

2016

2017

2018

A "land man" arrives on Clear Creek & in nearby areas to offer a contract for mineral rights, speculating on future fracking expansion into eastern KY along the Rogersville Shale. Neighbors & activists gather to educate & organize people to refuse the contracts.

Grassroots activism in key central KY counties stops the Bluegrass Pipeline project intended to transport natural gas liquids from fracking in PA & OH across KY for processing further south.

After years of activism throughout affected communities & nationally, President Obama rejects the Keystone XL pipeline noting that its approval would undercut U.S. global leadership on climate change.



Shortly after taking office, President Trump signs memoranda to revive both KXL & DAPL.



TIMELINES

- Artistic Response
- Local Organizing Response
- Key National Events

The **Ezell** project is a slow-developing story that evolves in response to the land, people and context from which it arose and in which it is shared.



Bob is honored by the Kentucky Arts Council and we invest the award in developing and sharing **Ezell** as a work-in-progress during the Clear Creek Solstice Spectacle, ROOTS Week and Hurricane Gap Community Performance Institute.

Kentucky & New Orleans artists collaborate in a series of residencies to bring **Ezell: Ballad of a Land Man** to full production at Clear Creek with support from NEFA, NET & NPN.



EZELL

BALLAD OF A LAND MAN

A PARABLE OF DOMINATION + RESILIENCE FROM THE FOOTHILLS OF APPALACHIA

Ezell tours in Appalachia and across the U.S. to raise awareness & support organizing that ends fossil fuel extraction, dismantles domination and supports all of us in building the resilience to live in harmony with nature and one another.

2019

2020/21

Activists educate & coordinate efforts statewide through the Pipelines, Fracking & KY's Future Beyond Fossil Fuels summits. KFTC develops a statewide Clean Power Plan through the Empower KY campaign.

Grassroots advocacy & organizing stops the proposed re-purposing of a pipeline that crosses 18 counties in KY to transport fracking wastes for processing on the Gulf Coast.

Coalitions of activists and organizations in KY, OH, PA & WV turn attention to the Appalachian Storage Hub. Efforts continue to extend renewable energy alternatives in the region amidst ongoing work to resist fracking & pipeline expansion.

Indigenous youth & leaders stand for their sovereignty at Standing Rock as water protectors of their homelands in opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline. Their actions inspire energy & climate activism throughout the U.S. and internationally.



U.S. Dept of Energy advocates for development of the Appalachian Storage Hub on the Ohio River to create a processing & distribution center for fracking products, by-products & plastics intended to replace the need for transport to the Gulf Coast. Fracking is a key political issue during presidential campaigning in surrounding battleground states and candidates who oppose fracking are considered unelectable in the region.



Erica Chambers

THE EZELL EXPERIENCE

AT HOME ON CLEAR CREEK

When [Ezell: Ballad of a Land Man](#) opened at home on Clear Creek, the one-hour solo outdoor performance was nestled within an immersive curated experience, crafted by dozens of our community members and attuned with the land from which it arose. We came to think of the full [Ezell](#) experience in five acts:

ACT 1. THE WELCOME

Orient to the experience and site, connect with the journey guide and enjoy a tasty treat & a drink.

ACT 2. THE JOURNEY

Make a contemplative trek with guide & group to the performance site amidst woodland art & music.

ACT 3. THE PERFORMANCE

Witness [Ezell: Ballad of a Land Man](#) performed in the woods on the ridge above Clear Creek.

ACT 4. THE RETURN

Engage with the woodlands and each other to embody [Ezell's](#) themes along the return journey.

ACT 5. THE FEAST

Enjoy a farm-fresh family-style feast harvested locally and inspired by the story & place of [Ezell](#).

OPTIONS ON TOUR

As we tour, we hope to share the Ezell experience as we did at home on Clear Creek in its fullest expression with as many people as possible. We also recognize that offering less production-intensive versions will make it feasible to visit more communities and share the essential story with more people. Here's what we have to offer:

The Full Ezell (3-4 hours)

We believe the richest way to share [Ezell](#) is as a mirror to its opening at home on Clear Creek — presented in five “acts” tailored to the host community and landscape. This is the most production intensive option and requires touring partners who are willing to engage both the challenges of outdoor site-responsive production as well as moving audience between locations and hosting a locally-sourced meal. Our team has years of experience producing these kinds of magical events at Clear Creek and will collaborate with partners to manifest this full experience as we tour.



The Journey with Ezell (2-3 hours)

For an immersive experience with fewer production elements, we can offer the 1-hour [Ezell](#) performance with a brief orienting welcome as well as a journey to and from the performance site. Depending on the distance between the performance site and the welcome point, this option will allow for a range of engagement with the land, the story and community on the trek to and from the performance site.

The Slim Ezell (~1 hour)

For partners who are presenting within particular formats or limitations, we can offer the performance itself in a roughly 1-hour timeframe. The performance requires a setting ideally within or near woodlands into which set pieces and seating can be temporarily installed, so this option still requires partners who are willing to present outdoors and address the challenges that arise with theater outside of the theater.



Ezell in Excerpts (any length)

If you'd like a sharing of [Ezell](#) in a conference, festival, classroom, other indoor setting or in abbreviated form, we can offer excerpts of the performance at any length tailored to the context in which it's presented. Excerpt sharings can also be accompanied by any of the Learning Exchanges & Artist Talks or other tailored offerings developed in collaboration with a presenting partner.

AUDIENCE

Given our rural setting and grounding in cultural organizing, the effort to build and engage audience at Clear Creek has taken its own unique path. We've cultivated our local as well as extended audience by engaging our communities in the origination and development of the characters, story and set for this [Ezell](#) work as well as other original Clear Creek productions and dozens of community story plays throughout Appalachia. We've also incorporated traditional food ways and meals into our productions and focused on inviting people into holistic experiences that are relevant, memorable and inspiring.

As we tour, our priority is to share [Ezell](#) with a range of audiences and host partners including:

- frontline communities for fossil fuel extraction, pipelines and processing as well as related industries and infrastructure
- people and places most impacted or at risk due to climate change
- cultural exchanges with communities of color, indigenous communities or urban communities that disrupt stereotypes and build connections between our places and people
- places where people are seeking to live in harmony with nature and with others, creating alternatives and solutions to the climate crisis and domination at any scale
- partners that can afford our full touring fees and thus potentially subsidize the work touring to other less-resourced communities

We encourage all our presenting partners to consider how they might extend and target their audience as well as their budget with these considerations in mind.





Eric Chambers

ACCESSIBILITY

Hosting events in the woods at our off-grid home and venue in the foothills of Appalachian Kentucky has taught us a thing or two about accessibility. While our own venue and many of those to which we tour are unlikely to be ADA-compliant given their natural settings, we are committed to make the spaces we are in and the work we offer as accessible to all as possible. It's important to us that we partner with others who share this commitment.

At Clear Creek, accessibility for [Ezell](#) meant offering an option other than walking between the parking field, welcome area, performance site and feast setting. Given our off-grid location on the side of a mountain, we rented a 6-seat all-terrain vehicle commercially known as a "Viking" and known affectionately by our team as Vicky, adorned with wind chimes and ribbons blowing in the breeze! Vicky's presence required that we adjust the timing of the journey and audience engagement at each presentation in order to allow different forms of the journey to co-exist.

Accessibility also meant preparing a meal that was primarily vegetarian and gluten-free with most of the offerings also dairy-free. It meant being clear in advance about the composting outhouses and the opportunities there would be to access them. And so many more things, some of which we have learned by many years of experience and feedback and others of which we are still to learn within our own community and others'. We're glad to partner with presenters to meet accessibility needs and make it possible for [Ezell](#) to be shared with everyone who'd like to experience it.



Erica F. Hildland

EZELL IN RESIDENCY

We and our presenting partners are investing a lot in one another when we agree to share [Ezell](#). We are eager to make good use of our time in each community and a series of planning conversations leading up to our engagement will help us all prepare for that time. Below is an overview of the on-site components that bring Ezell to full fruition.

SITE VISIT

Our work in a community is initiated on the ground through a two day site visit several months prior to installation. We'll use that time to align on the site choice and production plan with the presenting team as well as build relationships and connection between our team, the host community and land. This is a great time to plan a community engagement meal where our team can get a sense of the people and place and where we can together begin to generate a buzz about the production to help generate audience and other forms of support.

INSTALLATION

We anticipate that our team will be on site approximately a week in advance of public sharing. During this time, we will install the [Ezell](#) set, rehearse the performance and collaborate with the presenting team to prepare for other aspects of production such as the journey and feast. We're also available during this time for a range of learning exchanges, workshops, creative endeavors, presentations and more while we're in residency which can help build audience and generally deepen the experience.

LEARNING EXCHANGES + ARTIST "TALKS"

We've found that our shared work becomes even more powerful as a change-making agent when we have the opportunity to complement the story and experience with learning exchanges that invite people to explore and engage the themes and process of *Ezell* in ways that apply to their own bodies, relationships and communities. We've crafted offerings that can be tailored to a range of timeframes, groups and intentions:

DISMANTLING DOMINATION + CULTIVATING RESILIENCE

This learning exchange is facilitated using an approach based in somatics to explore where domination lives in each of us, in our interactions and in our communities with the intention of disrupting our own patterns of domination and cultivating the resilience that we and our communities need to be whole and healthy, in harmony with nature and with one another. It's a deep-dive into the themes of *Ezell* through engaging aspects of the story in our own bodies and can be adapted for accessibility in many ways as well as tailored to particular teams, groups, classrooms or other settings.



DEvised PERFORMANCE, COMMUNITY STORIES + ACTIVISM

Ezell: Ballad of a Land Man evolved over many years alongside our land stewardship, activism, regional artistic exchanges and community-story work throughout Appalachian Kentucky. In this learning exchange, we share the process of how *Ezell* emerged as a character and explore the many ways the development of his story was informed to create a performance intended to disrupt, inspire, heal and activate. We can extend this offering into an interactive workshop that engages participants in bringing forward characters and stories that need to be heard in their own contexts and communities.

MAKING ART + RITUAL WITH THE LAND

Each of *Ezell's* "acts" — welcome, journey, performance, return, feast — are both art and ritual intended to heal what needs healing and source ourselves abundantly for what lies ahead. Our intention is for this exchange to invite local folks into the creation and installation process of *Ezell* in their community, allowing us all an opportunity to deepen our connection with the place we are in. Awareness and honoring of the indigenous people and ways of the place will be invited as well as discernment of the impacts of colonization on who we are, what we create and how we might transform.



These learning exchanges can be shaped into a variety of contexts and timeframes, offered individually, as a series or combined into a day-long or multi-day retreat. We have a lot of facilitation experience and are happy to work with our hosts to co-design and manifest offerings that will bring the *Ezell* experience, process, themes and story to its fullest fruition in each community we visit.



OUR PEOPLE

Ezell is a collaborative ensemble project born of its place and people with the support of many collaborators from near and far. We're grateful to work with so many incredible people in making this shared work together.

TOURING TEAM

Devised and Performed by Bob Martin

Produced by Carrie Brunk

Directed by Nick Slie

Designed by Jeff Becker

Music & Sound by Cory Shenk

Artistic, Technical & Production Support provided by Nicole Garneau & Clare Hagan

HOME TEAM

In addition to the core touring team above, our premier at Clear Creek was supported by a great crew of artists, builders, farmers, foragers, neighbors and all sorts of other fine folks. We acknowledge them here knowing their contributions are carried with us as the work tours: Brent Adam, Faye Adams-Eaton, Joana Amorim, Xyara Asplen, Michael Beck, Ali Blair, Bugz, Adam Burke, Phil Feger, Erica Chambers, Erica Fladeland, Nicole Garneau, Jamie Hart, Loren Heacock, Bob Henshaw, Debra Hille, Peter Hille, Ben Johansen, Nick Kondziolka, Inan McFarland, Cheyenne Mize, Steve (Snoop) Moberly, Jo Nazro, Ron Owens, Kayla Preston, Timi Reedy, Yamil Rodriguez, Robert Rorrer, Sacha Runa, Terra Luna, Laney West, Laurie White, Connor Zaft and Tommy Johns & Will Hartsock of Neon Bites.

Prospectus Design by Ennis Carter, Social Impact Studios

Cover Art by Robert Gipe

Heartfelt love and appreciation to all of these amazing people and so many others by extension who have made Ezell possible. Giving thanks always for our collective abundance.

OUR PARTNERS

All of the work we do through Clear Creek Creative is made possible by the generosity and collaborative spirit of our communities near and far. We give thanks for living and working in such an abundant place and having countless opportunities to do meaningful & magical work with incredible people.

We are humbled & thrilled by the support we've received to bring *Ezell* to full fruition. Deep appreciation to our funding partners for recognizing the value of this work and investing it.

EZELL: BALLAD OF A LAND MAN

- is made possible with funding by the [New England Foundation for the Arts' National Theater Project](#), with lead funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and additional funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.
- is a [National Performance Network \(NPN\) Creation & Development Fund Project](#) co-commissioned by Carpetbag Theater in partnership with Mondo Bizarro and NPN.
- is made possible, in part, through a Continuation grant for our partnership with Mondo Bizarro from the [Network of Ensemble Theaters' Travel & Exchange Network \(NET/TEN\)](#), supported by lead funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.
- has also been supported through an AI Smith Fellowship Award granted to Bob Martin for artistic excellence from the [Kentucky Arts Council](#), the state arts agency, which is supported by state tax dollars and federal funding from the National Endowment for the Arts.
- was seeded and evolved over many years with the support of [Alternate ROOTS](#) through the Partners in Action program, an Artistic Assistance grant, fiscal sponsorship and the ongoing learning & support of an amazing network of artists.

As we take *Ezell* on the road, we will need support of many kinds in each community to make it possible. Big thanks are due to the [National Theater Project of the New England Foundation for the Arts](#) which is subsidizing our tour in many places. We welcome additional resources of all sizes and are happy to collaborate with potential presenters to secure funding and other resources to share the work.





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