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DISNEY GENERAL ENTERTAINMENT'S WRITING PROGRAM NAMES 2023 PARTICIPANTS

Last Year's Alumni Secure Staffing Assignments for 2022-2023 Seasons



Disney General Entertainment*

Top row (from left): Dallas Rico, Amanda Mortlock, Heidi-Marie Ferren, Kirby Marshall-Collins, Nikki Kashani, Sean Rivas;
Bottom row (from left): Melanie Martinez, Yaou Dou, Morgan Grain, Shawnee Gibbs, Shawnelle Gibbs, Kevin Ramlal, Maya Ayele

Disney General Entertainment (DGE) proudly announces the writers selected for its 2023 Writing Program and names the recipients of Disney Branded Television's Eunetta T. Boone Comedy Writer's Scholarship, established in 2020 by Disney Channel in honor of the late writer/producer for diverse and aspiring comedy writers.

Now in its 33rd year, Disney Creative Talent Development & Inclusion's one-year writing program is a highly selective initiative which helps participants secure their first TV staff writer assignments on a DGE series. The program also provides participants with mentorship, advanced professional development and access to DGE's creative executives, producers, showrunners and program alumni. Formerly known as the Disney|ABC Writing Program and the Walt Disney Television Writing Program, it is widely recognized as one of the entertainment industry's most successful of its type, with a 100% annual television staffing rate for over a decade. It has served as a launching pad for the many successful storytellers creating content for the Company's broadcast, cable and streaming platforms.

The 2023 DGE Writing Program participants include the following:

COMEDY

- Kevin Ramlal, "The Santa Clauses" writers' assistant/script coordinator (Pearland, Texas)

- Maya Ayele, “Saturdays” writers’ assistant (Boston, Mass.)
- Nikki Kashani, AGBO assistant; former “Liza on Demand” writers’ assistant (Los Altos Hills, Calif.)
- Sean Rivas, current programming coordinator (Glendora, Calif.)
- Shawnee Gibbs, reality TV producer; “Jessica’s Little Big World” writer** (Oakland, Calif.)
- Shawnelle Gibbs, reality TV producer; “Jessica’s Little Big World” writer** (Oakland, Calif.)

***Disney Branded Television’s Eunetta T. Boone Comedy Writer Scholars*

DRAMA

- Amanda Mortlock, former line producer; “Sacrifice” writers’ assistant (Singapore)
- Dallas Rico, showrunners’ assistant and production assistant (Brooklyn, N.Y.)
- Heidi-Marie Ferren, former Miss USO; content creator and sketch comic (Bentonville, Ark.)
- Kirby Marshall-Collins, “Nancy Drew” writers’ assistant (Chicago, Ill.)
- Melanie Martinez, independent writer and producer (Uniondale, N.Y.)
- Morgan Grain, “Reasonable Doubt” writers’ assistant (Atlanta, Ga.)
- Yaou Dou, “Sisterhood of Dune” writers’ assistant (Winterhaven, Fla.)

“The Creative Talent Development & Inclusion team is proud to launch this extremely talented group of writers into the next phase of their career,” said Tim McNeal, senior vice president, Creative Talent Development & Inclusion (CTDI). “The flagship Writing Program is one of the critical ways CTDI connects creative talent to opportunities across Disney and continues to fuel our company’s staffing pipeline specifically for emerging, diverse TV writers. We look forward to seeing this cohort shape the next generation of producers and showrunners.”

The program has kickstarted the careers of many established and award-winning writers, producers and showrunners for hit shows including “Dave,” “Godfather of Harlem,” “Grey’s Anatomy,” “Little Fires Everywhere,” “Power,” “Snowfall” and more. It also was the starting point for show creators and co-creators such as Erica Montolfo-Bura (“Zoe Ever After”), Reggie Bythewood (“Shots Fired”), Jordan Cahan (“Black Monday”), Zahir McGhee (“Queens”), Raamla Mohammed (“Reasonable Doubt”), Saladin Patterson (“The Wonder Years” and “Dave”), Peter Saji (“mixed-ish”) and Veena Sud (“The Killing,” “Seven Seconds”); and showrunners Aseem Batra (“I Feel Bad”), Ayanna Floyd Davis (“The Chi”), Dailyn Rodriguez (“Queen of the South”) and Anthony Sparks (“Queen Sugar”).

The participating writers of the 2022 program secured staffing assignments on 20th Television’s “True Lies”; ABC and 20th’s “Not Dead Yet” and “The Company You Keep”; ABC and ABC Signature’s “The Good Doctor,” “Home Economics,” “The Rookie” and “The Rookie: Feds”; ABC Signature’s “Criminal Minds: Evolution”; Disney Branded Television’s “Raven’s Home” and “Bunk’d”; Freeform and 20th’s “Single Drunk Female”; Hulu and 20th’s “How I Met Your Father” and FX’s “Dave.”

The program was the first of its kind to provide salary and benefits to its participants. All program writers will be under contract with DGE and receive a weekly salary and benefits prior to staffing. All program writers who staff on a DGE scripted series will be compensated at WGA scale. The DGE Writing Program has been managed and run by Liz Kelly, senior manager of DGE Creative Talent Development & Inclusion, for the past four years.

Disney General Entertainment's 2023 Writing Program participants' bios:

Amanda Mortlock is a Eurasian writer and producer currently residing in Los Angeles. Mortlock moved from Singapore to LA to attend University of Southern California's Business of Cinematic Arts program. After graduating, she worked in the film department of comic book publisher Radical Studios, starting as an assistant and moving up to director of Development, where she managed a slate of projects that included "Oblivion" (Universal) and "Hercules" (Paramount / MGM). Mortlock left to pursue physical production and has produced cult horror films such as "Some Kind of Hate," "Bone Tomahawk," "Beyond the Gates," and Blumhouse's "Holidays." As a line producer and UPM, she has worked on series for Hulu, Go90, Netflix, Nickelodeon, Snapchat and YouTube Originals, including Michelle Obama's Waffles + Mochi and Tab Time starring Tabitha Brown. Most recently, Mortlock was the writers' assistant on season two of "Sacrifice" on BET+ and co-wrote episode 209.

Dallas Rico, originally from Dallas, graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a degree in film and television. He spent several years as a high school Spanish teacher in Los Angeles and New York City while honing his voice as a writer. Last year, Rico sold his drama pilot, "Lessons," to NBC. Previously, he was a member of the writers' room support staff on the Lena Dunham-produced HBO Max series, "Generations," and later on the final season of the CBS show "Bull." In 2019, Rico won the WeScreenplay Diverse Voices competition. From 2020 to 2022, he served as an assistant to a showrunner. Moving nimbly between comedy and drama, his work celebrates Black, queer and blerd culture while challenging traditional ideas of masculinity. As a hobby, Rico enjoys performing stand-up, so everyone can laugh at his dating mishaps.

Heidi-Marie Ferren is a Cherokee/Sioux Polish American writer from Arkansas and Texas whose original pilots and screenplays have garnered awards and recognition from over 20 film festivals and competitions. She was recently showrunner's assistant for Jim O'Doherty ("Third Rock from the Sun," "Grounded for Life"), developing two new comedy series and a feature. She was a producer and story editor on the series "This Boy's Vida: Made In America," which premiered at the New York Latino Film Festival and is the other half of "The Blonde Jokes" duo, which was a finalist in sketch comedy for NBC's "Bring The Funny." Ferren has served United States as well as allied service members and veterans as the last and longest-reigning Miss USO, performing and speaking across the globe as an ambassador and steward of gratitude in over 1,000 venues and before four U.S. presidents. She is the first Indigenous woman to hold that title since its inception. Ferran was a finalist for the 2021 DGE Writing Program.

Kevin Ramlal is a Canadian-born, Texas-raised South Asian with roots in Trinidad as well as Tanzania. Raised with multiple cultural influences, Ramlal focuses on themes of identity and characters that are traditionally considered outsiders, always with a comedic slant. Most recently he was the writers' assistant and script coordinator for "The Santa Clauses," which premiered on Disney+ in November 2022. Previously, Ramlal worked on Freeform's "Kal Penn Approves This Message," Comedy Central's "Hot Mess Holiday" and Kal Penn's memoir, "You Can't Be Serious." Before that, Ramlal was a literary manager's assistant at Underground and freelanced in commercial production and post-production, specializing in music videos and short-form content. He received his B.F.A. in film and television production from the University of Southern California and interned at Material Pictures and Arad Productions. During 2021, his feature, "Citizen Nowhere," placed on Blacklist's 2021 CAPE List. Additionally, he participated in the Giant Leap Accelerator's inaugural class, developing his original half-hour pilot, "Manifest," with Giant Leap Media. Ramlal has also placed as

a finalist in the Nashville Film Festival screenwriting competition and has had his work premiere at Slamdance Film Festival.

Kirby Marshall-Collins is a Black, queer character writer who's spent years amplifying the voices of QTPOC through both art and community-based organizing. Collins writes fun and romantic, supernatural dramedies that physicalize the vulnerabilities and victories of queer/trans people. Collins was recently a writers' assistant on "Nancy Drew" (CW). In 2021, Collins was selected as one of 40 people for the Warner Bros Discovery Access Early Career Bootcamp, one of 14 chosen mentees in the Black Boy Writes & Black Girl Writes Mentorship Initiative, and one of 10 fellows in the Disruptors Fellowship. Collins is great at heart, aches, humor and relating everything to a Disney movie.

Maya Ayele is a Los Angeles-based comedy writer, raised in Boston by an Ethiopian father and Irish American mother. She credits her parents' contrasting cultural backgrounds as a source of her comedic writing. A first-generation college graduate, she earned a BA from Boston University's TV & Film School and went on to work various set PA and writers' PA positions on shows such as Marvel's "Runaways," "America's Next Top Model" and "Bridgerton." Ayele was most recently a writers' assistant on the upcoming Disney Channel show "Saturdays," where she co-wrote the episode "Mama Drama." Previously, she worked as a director's assistant on Paramount's action rom-com film "The Lost City," where she lived in the Dominican Republic for three months and spent most of her days on set in jungles and caves. Before this, she was a writers' assistant on ABC's "mixed-ish." Ayele attributes her unconventional upbringing to shaping her passion for writing fish-out-of-water stories centering on quirky characters who are navigating a crossroads of identity. She hopes to create truly inclusive comedic television that not only increases visibility of underrepresented groups but also breaks the stereotypes associated with them.

Melanie Martinez is a film and TV writer who grew up among a few pioneering Nuyorican families who moved to Long Island, where she had her first brush with showbiz when a casting call in her diverse neighborhood landed her smiling face on a box of Girl Scout cookies. Martinez received a B.A. in sociology from Harvard, where she wrote for the "Let's Go" travel series. She began her TV career in MSNBC's 24-hour newsroom before working as an associate producer for Michael Moore's "The Awful Truth." She moved to England to pursue a screenwriting M.A. at the UK's acclaimed National Film and Television School and spent 15 years in London, where she developed projects for British TV and was lead writer on web series "Sofia's Diary" and "Aisling's Diary." Martinez and her family recently traded East London for Westside Los Angeles. She recently applied her instinct for smart, big-hearted stories to feature TV romances "Calling for Love" and "The Engagement Back-Up" (UPtv). She was a finalist for the 2021 DGE Writing Program, part of the 2021-2022 Read Latinx Writers initiative and recently completed the 2022 NHMC Series Script Writers Program. When she's not writing, Martinez is busy learning Dungeons and Dragons lore with her 13-year-old son and helping her 4-year-old daughter in and out of her tutus.

Morgan A. Grain is a writer, producer and filmmaker based in Los Angeles but remains a Florida Peach (Orlando-born, Atlanta-bred) at heart. Grain graduated from Florida A&M University with a bachelor's degree in journalism and went on to become a freelance culture and entertainment writer, publishing work in outlets such as Essence Magazine, Harlem World Magazine, PAPER.com, Huffington Post Black Voices and Okayplayer.com. Her journalistic work focuses on the cultural contributions Black women make in the arts, entertainment and media. In 2016 she transitioned to tv

and film after receiving her master's degree in film and creative writing at New York University and studying producing in London. That same year, she worked at Berlin and Cannes Film Festivals while she wrote, produced and later directed two short films. She went on to work in film and television development and production on films like "Traffik" for Lionsgate and "Work It" for Netflix, and series like "You" from Alloy Entertainment and season three of MTV's "Scream" before becoming a writers' assistant on "Reasonable Doubt" and currently HBO's adaptation of Toni Morrison's novel "Sula." Grain's third short film, "Girls Night In," premiered at California Women's Film Festival in early 2022. Her work explores the complexity and nuance of Black womanhood through the interior lives and interpersonal relationships of characters ranging from reflective and self-fulfilled to raunchy and misbehaved.

Nikki Kashani is a first-generation Iranian American writer who was born and raised in Los Altos, California. She received her B.F.A. in film and television production from USC's School of Cinematic Arts in 2017. During her time at USC, Kashani interned at several entertainment companies such as Funny or Die, Broadway Video, Comedy Central and Disney's Digital Media Studios, where she was able to absorb the full spectrum of the creative process in real world settings. Upon graduating, Kashani secured a writers' PA role on HBO's "Watchmen" and fell in love with the ensemble dynamic of a writers' room. Following her time on the prestige drama, Kashani became a writers' assistant for the YouTube Red series "Liza on Demand," then proceeded to be a showrunner's assistant on the Amazon thriller "The Terminal List." Currently, she is an in-house writing assistant at AGBO, reporting directly to the two co-presidents of Story. Throughout her life, Kashani has used comedy as a conduit to explore both the dichotomy and alchemy of her dual identity. Her writing strives to elevate Middle Eastern narratives in TV and film, welcoming audiences to laugh alongside her as she navigates what it means to be first-generation in all its confusing glory.

Sean Rivas is a comedy writer from Glendora, California, who describes himself as "half-Mexican, half-white and 100% homosexual." Rivas holds a bachelor's degree in English and creative writing from UC Irvine and has graduated from the sketch writing programs at The Second City, Hollywood, and The Upright Citizen's Brigade, Los Angeles. While actively writing for sketch comedy shows in Los Angeles, Rivas is also the coordinator of Current Programming at bPossible, an independent feature film and documentary streaming platform, where he collaborates with Emmy®-winning producers. Rivas worked in documentary production and nonprofit marketing, supporting companies like The Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project, The Jane Goodall Institute, and Friends of the Dalai Lama. Rivas' writing has been seen on both The Second City, Hollywood Main Stage in his show "Deus Sex Machina" and at UCB Franklin in "Spider Babies." Most recently, Rivas placed as a finalist for the 2021 NBC Writers' on the Verge program and the 2021 Disney General Entertainment Writing Program. He is also a founding member of the Pre-Rainbow Pages, a merit-based list of LGBTQ+ pre-WGA writers, and has been selected twice as a Mentee for the Read Latinx Writers Initiative. Being dyslexic and growing up with a speech impediment, Rivas uses his writing to tell stories that often go unheard in an effort to give voices to the voiceless.

Shawnee Gibbs and **Shawnelle Gibbs**, known as "**The Gibbs Sisters**," are an African American comedy writing team from Oakland, California, who currently call South Los Angeles home. Graduates of San Francisco State University and University of Southern California's School of Cinema, The Gibbs Sisters have produced nonfiction programming for National Geographic Channel, The Learning Channel and Fox Sports. They were awarded a 2022 Writers in Residence at Renaissance House in Martha's Vineyard. The Gibbs Sisters have a background in kids, YA and family animation,

and recently served as staff writers for Cartoon Network's "Jessica's Big Little World." They seek to write stories to amplify the voices of women of color in comedy and use laughter as medicine for marginalized groups. Shawnee and Shawnelle Gibbs are the recipients of the 2023 Disney Branded Television Eunetta T. Boone Comedy Writers Scholarship.

A first-generation Chinese immigrant, **Yaou Dou** was born in Germany and raised in Florida. He is currently the writers' assistant on HBO Max's "Sisterhood of Dune" and was previously an assistant at Phantom Four and CAA. Last year, Yaou was a finalist /1st Drama Alternate for the Disney Writing Program as well as a semifinalist for the WB Writers' Workshop. Curious and determined to broaden his worldview, he has embarked on many research trips, touring the supercarrier USS Carl Vinson and Virgin Galactic's SpaceShipTwo, as well as graduating from the FBI Citizens Academy. A UC Berkeley political economy graduate, Yaou was slated to begin work at the U.S. State Department's Sydney Consulate but failed his security clearance; this led to an unplanned wandering of the Australian outback, which has led to a lifelong love of camping and curating a wardrobe that consists only of hiking shirts and shorts. Yaou's stories focus on layered, motivated outsiders working within complex worlds; the global goal of his writing is to exemplify and project forward-looking values to a wide audience.

About Disney General Entertainment Content

Disney General Entertainment Content (DGE) is a collection of renowned content brands at The Walt Disney Company creating original entertainment and news programming for the Company's streaming platforms Disney+, Hulu and Star, and its broadcast and cable networks. Its extensive brand portfolio is comprised of ABC Entertainment, ABC News, Disney Branded Television, Freeform, FX, Hulu Originals, National Geographic Content and Onyx Collective, as well as Disney Television Studios, which include 20th Television, 20th Television Animation and ABC Signature. The creative brands and studios are responsible for developing and producing some of the most popular and culture-defining shows: from long-running franchises—"9-1-1," "Atlanta," "black-ish," "Family Guy," "Grey's Anatomy," "Mickey Mouse Clubhouse," "The Simpsons," "World News Tonight," and the "American Horror Story" and "Genius" franchises—to the newest hits including "Abbott Elementary," "The Old Man" and "The Proud Family: Louder & Prouder." In 2022, DGE's programming excellence earned 288 Emmy® nominations across daytime, primetime, news and documentary categories; and Onyx Collective's "Summer of Soul (...Or, When the Revolution Could Not Be Televised)" won the Academy Award® for Best Documentary Feature, their first project since launching in 2021.

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