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Starz #TakeTheLead Writers’ Intensive Announces Season 4 Fellows

By [Denise Petski](#) 
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Clockwise: Frances Fuster, Emily Orr, Laura Santero, Lia Romeo
Frances Fuster/Courtesy Emily Orr/Kelsey Romo/Whitney Kidder

EXCLUSIVE: [Starz](#), NewFilmmakers Los Angeles and The National Association of Latino Independent Producers have announced the Season Four Fellows of Starz’s #TakeTheLead Writers’ Intensive. They are Francis Fuster, Emily Orr, Lia Romeo, and Laura Santoro.

As described by Starz, “These talented storytellers represent bold, authentic voices dedicated to crafting compelling narratives, distinctive characters, and stories that push creative boundaries.”

The initiative provides participants with opportunities to learn from and connect with industry professionals across the television industry, including Starz President of Original Programming Kathryn Busby, Starz Vice President of Original Programming Sebastian Arboleda, Starz Director of Original Programming Ashley Whitaker, Shondaland’s Vice President of Creative Content Marco Esquivel, Mediapro Head of U.S. Hispanic Content Francesca Ricagni, Sandbox Entertainment Senior Vice President of Television Tara Roy, *Outlander: Blood of My Blood* Writer and Producer Danielle Berrow, TV Writer and *P-Valley* Co-Executive Producer Nicole Jefferson Asher, Echo Lake Entertainment Literary Manager Chelsea Benson, *Outlander* and *Outlander: Blood of My Blood* Supervising Producer Elicia Besette, TV Writer and Executive Producer Natalie Chaidez, TV Writer Jamey Hatley, and more.

“We are incredibly proud to partner with Starz on the #TakeTheLead Writers’ Intensive, a program that continues to open doors for the next generation of storytellers,” said Diana Luna, Executive Director of NALIP, and Larry Laboe, Co-Founder and Executive Director of NFMLA. “Now more than ever, supporting emerging creators is vital to ensuring that fresh perspectives and diverse voices shape the stories that define our time. Starz’s continued leadership in nurturing new talent exemplifies the transformative power of collaboration and the lasting impact of investing in the storytellers of tomorrow.”

Additional details on this year’s fellows can be found below in their bios from Starz.

FRANCIS FUSTER

Francis Fuster is an NYC Queens-born native, and while (on paper) she sounds like a white, Jewish man, she’s, in fact, Afro-Latina. A former sketch comedy writer at the Magnet Theater and a contributing writer for the satirical women’s magazine Reductress, her comedy is bold and surreal meets magical realism. She’s worked on shows such as *Gordita Chronicles*, *The Upshaws* and most recently, *The Lincoln Lawyer*. This year, Francis was a quarter-finalist for the Black Boy Writes & Black Girl Writes Mentorship Initiative.

EMILY ORR

Emily Orr is a Black comedy writer from the Deep South, now based in Los Angeles. She was most recently staffed on *Wizards Beyond Waverly Place* for Disney. A Harvard College graduate, Emily wrote for The Harvard Lampoon and Hasty Pudding Theatricals, and earned the Franklin Ford Award for “strong intellectual ability and dry wit,” as well as the Kwame Anthony Appiah Prize for the most outstanding senior thesis relating to the African diaspora. Her academic and comedic writing both ask the same questions: How do we become who we are, and how weird can it get?

Before jumping into television, she created digital media for the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., producing videos about 200-year-old Italian sculpting techniques, DIY Van Gogh makeup looks, and why art history is more alive (and chaotic) than you think. Emily’s original work blends absurd comedy, colorful world-building, and cultural critique, often centering outsiders who are trying—and failing—in deeply funny ways, to understand themselves and each other.

LIA ROMEO

Lia Romeo is a queer playwright, novelist, essayist, and screenwriter who grew up in Colorado and has somehow managed to spend her entire adult life in New Jersey (not the plan). She writes funny stories about sad things. She is especially drawn to stories about women in transition, who are questioning the rules they’ve always lived by and figuring out how to make their own.

She is a recent graduate of the Juilliard playwrighting program and holds an undergraduate degree from Princeton. In 2025, she was nominated for the Outer Critics’ Circle award for Best New American Play. Her plays have been produced off-Broadway in NYC and regionally around the country, as well as internationally in Paris and Edinburgh.

She is the author of a novel, *Dating the Devil* (BelleBooks), and a humor book, *11,002 Things to Be Miserable About* (Abrams Image), and her essays have been published in the Washington Post, Newsweek, the Huffington Post, and other major national publications. She teaches in the graduate creative writing program at Fairleigh Dickinson University. She is a cancer survivor and the mother of a six-year-old son.

LAURA SANTORO

Laura Santoro, originally from San Dimas, CA, is a TV writer whose dark comedies take aim at social taboos, messy families, and the absurdities that come with both. Raised on a thoroughbred horse farm in Southern California, she learned early on that nothing has more drama than a racetrack—except the people who raised her. The daughter of a Mexican mother and an Italian-American father, her biracial background drives her storytelling, focusing on identity, disability, and the Latine experience. Laura has written two episodes of television for Netflix’s *Gabby’s Dollhouse* and has worked as a Writers’ Assistant or Script Coordinator on *Bad Robot’s Duster* (HBO Max), *Lopez vs Lopez* (NBC), *Shining Vale* (Starz), *Best Foot Forward* (Apple TV+), and *Turner & Hooch* (Disney+). She is a ScreenCraft TV Comedy Quarterfinalist, WeScreenplay Diverse Voices Lab Quarterfinalist, and an Austin Film Festival Second Rounder. For over five years, she was a top-ranked singles tennis player in California for the United States Tennis Association.