

# Christmas in July: Meet Taylor Kalupa, Mario Lopez’s romantic interest in Lewiston-filmed ‘Christmas at The Starlight’

Great American Media feature – formerly known as ‘Rewinding Christmas’  
– set to air Thanksgiving weekend on Great American Family & Pure Flix

**BEHIND THE SCREENS WITH JOSHUA MALONI**

There is a saying that, “Behind every good doctor, there is a nurse.” Its meaning: Although the doctor gets credit, nurses are essential to patient care and treatment. The same can be said for Great American Media’s Lewiston-filmed holiday feature, “Christmas at The Starlight.” Though stars Mario Lopez and Tony Danza held the headlines while in town, it’s their costar, Taylor Kalupa, who is integral to the movie’s appeal.

By now, fans of aspirational rom-coms know it’s the strength of the female lead that determines the film’s ability to connect with audiences.

Fortunately, Kalupa is a virtuoso when it comes to Christmas cheer. In fact, the multi-multi-hyphenate – actor, writer, producer, dancer, model, Casa Antica patron – has worked with the genre’s “who’s who.”

- She cowrote the Candace Cameron Bure-Paul Greene feature “Timeless Tidings of Joy,” and the Bure-Eric Johnson film “A Christmas Less Traveled.”

- She’s costarring in the Laura Osnes-Ryan McPartlin movie “Silver Bells at Christmas.”

- She worked as crew for the Jillian Murray-led “Christmas in the Pines,” as well as Erin Cahill’s “Christmas on the Range.”

If cocoa is for closers, then Kalupa has earned her marshmallows.

Find out more about the California-born artist, and her time in Western New York, in this edited Q&A.

**BTS:** *We’ve been fortunate the past two years in that we’ve had a lot of productions come our way. Tell me about your Lewiston experience.*

**Taylor Kalupa:** It’s been wonderful. The cast and crew is amazing. Working with Mario and Tony and Dominic and the director, Jody, and everyone is awesome. And then being here, honestly, it’s like a breath of fresh air, because even for example the other night when we were doing a walk and talk scene, me and Mario, it was like a whole group of people in Lewiston were across the street (at the Brickyard Pub & BBQ) and just cheering after every take. Everyone is just so kind and really happy that we’re here to film, so it’s been really welcoming.

**BTS:** *We hear that a lot. We hear that people in other cities, maybe, see it so often that they’ve taken it for granted – or they just don’t care anymore. But in Western New York, it’s still a big deal. What did it feel like to be doing the walk and talk, and to be getting that kind of feedback from the people across the street? That was pretty raucous!*

**Taylor Kalupa:** Yeah, it felt amazing. It honestly kind of reminded me of, when you’re acting in this industry after a bunch of years – I mean, every time it’s really fun,



Taylor Kalupa with “Christmas at The Starlight” costar Mario Lopez. (Image courtesy of Platform Public Relations)

obviously, to come and work – but it was this really wonderful reminder of kind of what it felt like when I first got into acting. The excitement of first day on set or first movie I’m filming – it kind of brought that back – because when you realize that the people around the town are experiencing this and it’s such a big deal for them, it really just adds a level of gratitude that I get to do what I love and bring that kind of cheer to the people who live in the area.

**BTS:** *I know you have a pretty tight schedule, but did you get out in Lewiston?*

**Taylor Kalupa:** Gosh, I’ve been working every day, all day. I’m also filming a TV show that’s in Rochester at the same time. It’s called “Abilene.” It’s filming out there. I haven’t had a ton of free time, but something that did stand out is, after filming (at the end of June), Casa Antica, they were just so kind. They stayed open late for us. We got to go eat after we wrapped, and it was like this amazing Italian. They just kept bringing dish after dish, and it was just really special, and just very welcoming.

I feel like I got to experience Lewiston. We went back there for dinner again, like on another night before we went to go see Tony perform (at Seneca Niagara Resort & Casino), and just driving through the town and walking around, the shops are so cute. I really want to go.

**BTS:** *I’m glad you were able to go over to Casa Antica – they have really good food, and they do take care of their customers.*

**As you said, you’ve done Christmas movies before. What did you like about this script? Obviously, there’s working with Tony and Mario, but what was it about this project?**

**Taylor Kalupa:** I’ve acted in other Christmas movies, but I also have written a lot, so I’m usually writing a bunch of the Christmas movies. And so, getting to do one that I had nothing to do with the writing is really fun to step into.

Something about this script that really stood out is the family dynamic, I think, between Tony and Mario and Dominic (Lopez). I really loved the story element of Ava, which is my character, having spent her whole life not really feeling like any place was her home; moving around a lot; always moving for her job; never

planting roots; and her stepping into this world of seeing what it’s like to actually have this generational, family love that is such a strong unit, and getting to step into that. I really love that element of people realizing; and also, the really sweet element of community, and what being in a town and having the people around you support you means. I really love that element.

And of course, I love the music and the dancing. I’m a dancer. I don’t dance in this. Ava, my character, doesn’t dance. Maybe in the sequel? I’m a trained (dancer). I did competitive dance. Started with tap dance. So, getting to watch them do tap – it’s just really fun.

**BTS:** *Tell me more about working with Mario and Tony.*

**Taylor Kalupa:** Mario is the kindest. For how many times people stop him from the street and ask for photos, he is the most kind, generous person, honestly, I’ve been around on one of these sets. He stops and takes a photo with everyone. He’s so sweet to them.

And also, he’s such a great scene partner and someone to work with. I feel like we just had a natural chemistry and banter right off the bat. He’s just so down to earth. Very talented. I mean, gosh, we’ll film like a really lengthy scene with lines, and then it’s like, “Oh, we’re going to end 10 minutes early for lunch because Mario’s going to go film ‘Extra.’” He shifts into doing “Extra,” and I was like, “Did you practice this before?” And he’s like, “Oh, no.” It’s like second nature. I think he could do it in his sleep, he’s that talented.

So, it’s been really awesome getting to work with him. I mean, he’s been doing this for so long, and his talent and skill is just incredible.

And then Tony – I grew up watching reruns of “Who’s the Boss?” It was one of my favorite shows as a kid. And so, when I found out I’m doing this movie with him, I was so excited to meet him. I mean, he’s such a legend – and then he’s so kind. They’re both so kind – they’re both very similar in that regard.

Something that I noticed about Tony that I really want to take away from this, that I’m like, “I need to get better at this”: He remembers every single person’s name. So, from the first day on set, it didn’t matter if it was someone just delivering a coffee that wasn’t even working on the set. He would remember their name – and he makes sure to say it a couple times out loud, and then he’ll remember it later.

A lot of actors don’t care about people – especially after years and years and years of being that much of a star. It’s really refreshing to see someone who has that kind of a career care about every single person.

I have just the highest praises for both of them and working with them.



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