Lights, camera — Cleveland!

Denzel Washington, Courtney Love due to start shooting this spring

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Get out your autograph books and load up the Instamatic, Cleveland. Come spring, parts of this city are going to resemble the star-studded backlot at Universal Studios.

If all goes as planned — and it's wise to remember that nothing in Hollywood ever goes as planned — Denzel Washington is due to arrive in March, to direct and star in "Finding Fish," the inspirational true-life story of Antwone Fisher.

In April, Courtney Love is supposed to hit town, along with Jennifer Esposito, Luis Guzman and Isaiah Washington, to star in "Welcome to Collinwood," written and directed by brothers Joe and Anthony Russo.

Why has Hollywood suddenly awakened to the attractions of Cleveland, city of light, city of magic?

Same reason anything gets done in the entertainment industry: connections.

Fisher, who wrote the screenplay for "Finding Fish" as well as the upcoming William Morrow-published book of the same title, grew up in Cleveland. So did the Russo brothers. Both were adamant that their Cleveland stories should be made where it all happened.

"The bottom line is, our stories can't be told anywhere else," said Anthony Russo, who was speaking on a cell phone as he headed to a meeting in Los Angeles with a representative of the Greater Cleveland Film Commission and a Cleveland union official.

Russo acknowledged that the brothers had felt some pressure to shoot the film in Canada, where government rebates and the favorable — not to say ludicrous — exchange rate made filming a lot cheaper. Cost considerations, he said, make Cleveland a difficult sell.

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"That is in large part what this meeting is about now," he said.

"Trying to make Cleveland work for our budget. Toronto is kind of always in the air, for any production, because of the low costs. But if you read our script, (shooting in Toronto) is almost insulting, because it's so indelibly Cleveland."

The film, which Russo said was a "Down and Out in Cleveland" story, is a heist comedy about a group of nickel-and-dime hustlers who decide to rob a pawn shop. Love plays a fading neighborhood moll who helps them plan it.

The film, budgeted at $10.5 million, is one of the first productions to come from Section Eight, the 6-month-old production company headed by actor George Clooney and director Steven Soderbergh.

Joe Russo, 29, and Anthony Russo, 30, met Soderbergh at the Slamdance Film Festival in Park City, Utah, in 1997. Soderbergh was there with his film "Schizopolis," and the Russos had their debut film "Pieces." Soderbergh saw it, and a week after the festival he called the brothers and told them he loved their movie and would like to help them with their next one. For the next three years, he was their mentor.

Clooney and Soderbergh will be executive producers for the picture, but since they will be working on the remake of the classic Rat Pack movie "Ocean's Eleven" this spring, it's unlikely they will spend much time in Cleveland.

"Finding Fish," a $14 million drama, is slated to spend two weeks shooting here, mostly in the Glenville area where Fisher grew up. It tells the hard-luck life story of Fisher, who was born in prison to a single mother after his father was shot and killed by a girlfriend. At the age of 5, Fisher went into foster care, where he was abused and neglected. He joined the Navy, and, with the help of a Navy psychiatrist, he put his life back on track.

Fisher, working as a security guard at Sony Pictures in Hollywood when he told his story to a producer, Todd Black, head of Black and Blue Productions. Black hired Fisher away from his security job, set him up in an office with a computer, and helped him write the screenplay of his life.

After 41 drafts, Washington