Film gives Cleveland reason to take a bow

By JULIE E. WASHINGTON
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We Clevelanders can be forgiven for thinking that the city, and not Rob Lowe, is the real star of “Proximity,” the cable TV movie filmed here last year.

“Proximity” was produced by Alan Schechter, a 1983 graduate of Shaker Heights High School who pushed for the film to be made in Cleveland.

Shots of Superior Ave. downtown, the Free Stamp, the Flats, Jacobs Field, the Soldiers and Sailors Monument and many other familiar locations make the city look as glamorous as New York or Toronto, cities that are used for many film locations. Even Dave’s Supermarket on the near West Side gets a beauty shot.

“Proximity,” Rob Lowe stars as an ex-con convict who believes he is a victim of a conspiracy to kill him.

William Conroy (Lowe) is serving time for manslaughter when his friend in the next cell dies, supposedly by committing suicide. Then things get really strange. Another prisoner tries to kill Conroy while both are riding in a prison van. The van crashes, and Conroy escapes, convinced that he has uncovered a conspiracy to kill prisoners. He’s chased by a prison assassination team made up of two guards and a psycho convict.

The action-thriller, directed by Scott Zehl, is a mildly enjoyable romp if you can ignore the mediocre dialog and some implausibility. Lowe looks as if he’s having an out-of-body experience — his body walking through “Proximity” but his mind still on the set of the television show he stars in, “The West Wing.”

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The web of danger soon includes Conroy’s family, his attorney, a newspaper reporter and Jim Corcoran (James Coburn), who runs a victims’ rights organization. Coburn, with his authoritative air and crown of snowy-white hair, is easily the best thing in “Proximity.” At first, his subplot seems completely irrelevant, then it comes into sharp focus at the movie’s climax.

A couple of ho-hum car chases through the industrial section of the Flats and a shoot-out at Tower City Center punctuate the action. Prison scenes, by the way, were shot in Grafton.

Kelly Rowan, T.C. Carson (“Living Single”) and Mark Boone Jr. (“The General’s Daughter”) also star in “Proximity.” Several local actors have important speaking roles. They include Scott Plate as newspaper reporter David Dart and Rick B. Williams as Conroy’s prison friend.

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