

MUSICAL HIT THAT'S WORTH SEARCHING FOR



Mystery: Sixto Rodriguez

THIS film tells a tale far too incredible to be true — yet it is, indeed, a documentary. It's the story of a rock figure so insignificant you're very unlikely to have heard of him. But it's riveting. Sixto Rodriguez was a singer-songwriter of Mexican-Native American descent, born in 1942. He sang in Detroit bars, but was so shy he kept his back to the audience. He released two albums in 1970 and 1971. They didn't sell, and his career failed to take off. The story went that after one particularly humiliating gig, he committed the most grotesque onstage suicide in rock history. Some claimed he doused himself in lighter fluid and set himself on fire. Others said he responded to another evening of audience apathy

Searching For Sugar Man (12A)

Verdict: Seek this one out ★★★★★

by putting a bullet in his head. The irony was that he was utterly unaware that in South Africa he was hailed as a rock god. More famous there than Elvis or The Beatles, he became the voice of white revolt against apartheid. Curiously, no money from his albums nor news of his success reached the singer. Rodriguez's voice is strong and distinctive, like a less reedy James Taylor or a more robust Donovan, and his songs are soulful, melodic folk-rock with literate lyrics and a blue-collar protest edge that led some critics to call him the

Hispanic Bob Dylan. For my money, he's closer to Bruce Springsteen. Over a fast-paced 85 minutes, the search for Rodriguez — directed by Swede Malik Bendjelloul — unfolds like a thriller. I won't spoil it by telling you more, but the twist in the tale helped this film win two prizes at the Sundance Festival. It's an inspiring celebration of the human spirit and an unjustly forgotten talent. If you watch no other film this month, do see this one. It's truly amazing. Let's hope the big, corporate multiplexes allow a little leeway to a film that isn't about a comic-book hero and reserve a small screen to honour a real one. If they do, it could run for months — the word of mouth will be that good.