

The sweetest ending for Detroit's lost sugar man

SEARCHING FOR SUGAR MAN

12A CERT, 86 MIN

DIR MALIK BENDJELLOUL

STARRING SIXTO RODRIGUEZ, EVA RODRIGUEZ REGAN RODRIGUEZ, SANDRA RODRIGUEZ-KENNEDY

The good news about *Searching for Sugar Man* is that it is not a summer blockbuster about a man endowed with superpowers after eating a spoonful of radioactive demerara. The better news is that it is one of the most uplifting documentaries in recent memory.

In 1970, a Detroit folk singer called Sixto Rodriguez released an LP called *Cold Fact*. His politicised lyrics and toasty, tobacco-rich voice drew critical comparisons with Bob Dylan but neither that album nor its follow-up made much of an impact, so he found work in the city's thriving demolitions industry, his short-lived musical career falling between the cracks of American counterculture.

Except, that is, in South Africa. Malik Bendjelloul's film tells how Rodriguez, unwittingly, became a bigger star in the apartheid-riven nation than Elvis Presley. Tracks deemed subversive, such as the eponymous *Sugar*



Toasty voice: Sixto Rodriguez

Man, were individually scratched out by censors.

Urban legend had it that Rodriguez had committed suicide, but two devotees vowed to winnow out the truth, and their online appeal caught the eye of their idol's eldest daughter. Bendjelloul relates the miraculous, tumultuous journey that followed with enchanting interviews and touchingly ham-fisted camcorder footage shot by the Rodriguez girls of their father's late ascent into stardom. The lilting, honeyed soundtrack, made up of Rodriguez's own songs, makes his relative obscurity here seem all the more puzzling. Happily, this film may set that right. **RC**

TRATING ★★★★★