

FIRST IMPRESSION: MALIK BENDJELLOUL

Mysterious singer-songwriter Sixto Rodriguez, discovered in the late 60s in a corner of a Detroit bar called The Sewer, released two seminal albums then disappeared. Amid rumours of self-immolation onstage, what happened next to the "rock'n'roll Lord Lucan" is evocatively told in Swedish director Malik Bendjelloul's debut documentary *Searching For Sugar Man*.

Your documentary unfolds like a detective story – how did it all begin?

Well, a detective in Cape Town actually told me the story. I fell in love with the story before I even heard Rodriguez's music.

Why do you think his records flopped?

He performed with his back to the audience – probably not the best way to sell records. Also, he had a Mexican-sounding name in the early 70s, when this music was overwhelmingly Caucasian – Robert Zimmerman changed his name to Bob Dylan, Rodriguez refused to do that. He was challenging the white pop scene. If you were a Mexican youth back then you were allowed to play Mexican music, but his music was challenging the likes of Bob Dylan, The Velvet Underground and The Doors.

Did he continue to write music after being dropped by his label?

He never stopped. He wrote new songs that maybe we'll never hear. He always believed he was a musician, always walked around the streets of Detroit carrying his guitar. If you're an artist you're an artist, that's the only way I can explain it.

Detroit is so much a part of Rodriguez and his music.

Yes. There's nowhere like Detroit, it's a modern necropolis, all these art deco masterpieces crumbling away. It's like an urban prairie, so beautiful in a hard-bitten way – like Rodriguez's music.

His lyrics are very socially conscious – did he get involved in politics?

He ran for mayor – politics and songwriting have been his life. He has a PhD in philosophy, he's very much a thinking man. He comes from a tough, poor background, but it didn't matter – that's really what this story says. Everyone goes through bullshit in life, it's what you do with it that counts.

Rodriguez had no idea he was a huge phenomenon in South Africa. How do you explain his popularity there?

He's as big as the Rolling Stones there! No one was

as important in terms of political inspiration, and expressing opposition to apartheid. The kids growing up in the apartheid era were so restricted and angry – if they spoke out against it they were thrown in jail. The first white resistance came from the Voëlvry punk movement and for them, it was Rodriguez records that shone a torch and guided them into this music that changed the world. This man living in a small house in Detroit, without a telephone, working construction jobs, completely ignored in America – he had no idea what his music was doing across the other side of the world. I'm happy to say Rodriguez does actually have a telephone now.

TEXT HANNAH LACK

SEARCHING FOR SUGAR MAN is out on July 27. Its soundtrack is released on July 24 on Sony Legacy / Light in the Attic

Image courtesy of Red Box Films / Passion Pictures



FILM OF THE MONTH: SWANDOWN

The helming of a giant swan pedalo all the way from Hastings to Hackney via the canal network is the subject of *Swandown*, by

director/artist Andrew Kötting and notorious psychogeographer Iain Sinclair. One bright clear day in October, Dazed discovered the contraption slowly paddling into view near Angel and spoke to Kötting, who disembarked with a bout of trenchfoot in a custom suit with swandown lining, shrunk after numerous days "at sea". This

particular day was the last leg of the journey, an irreverent act of pedalling, carousing and drinking on arguably the slowest, least hi-tech and most absurd form of transport available as a protest against the hyper-corporate Olympics. It's also a semi-homage to conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader, who, as Kötting explains, "was lost at sea in 1975 attempting to cross the Atlantic in a pocket cruiser." The film features snippets of voiceover from Werner Herzog, while the likes of Alan Moore and Stewart Lee jump aboard to offer their thoughts on this mini-odyssey – along with more concise commentary from the general public ("wankers"). The result is a "Benny Hill meets William Blake" wander along Britain's coastal boundaries and inlets.

TEXT
SUSANNA DAVIES-CROOK

SWANDOWN is out on July 20

Image courtesy of Cornerhouse Artist Film

FILM



CULT VAULT: ADALEN 31 CHOSEN BY MIA HANSEN-LØVE

Mia Hansen-Løve is known for her naturalistic approach to portrayals of relationships in movies such as *Le père de mes enfants* (2009). For Cult Vault the French director recommends 1969's *Adalen 31*, by Swedish filmmaker Bo Widerberg, which won the Grand Prix at Cannes and was given an X rating in the US.

"Widerberg was the next big filmmaker after Bergman in Sweden, and suffered a lot from being in his shadow – though you can't compare them. *Adalen 31* is about the first big strike in Sweden, which took place in a small village near the sea and ended in blood. But the story of this major event is told with a perspective that is modern and original, with most of the film centred around the teenagers in the town as they discover life and love. It's only near the end that you get closer to the heart of the story and by that time you've almost forgotten what the film is really about. Widerberg was heavily influenced by the French nouvelle vague, and he used handheld cameras. There's a grace to the film, but at the same time it's a big, ambitious film on an important subject."

TEXT ANANDA PELLERIN

BFI FILM CLASSICS

To celebrate the long-running series' 20th anniversary, the British Film Institute is releasing a limited edition, 12-book set. With elegant new jackets covering tomes on films like *Blade Runner*, *The Conformist* and *Don't Look Now*, it's perfect holiday reading for film freaks everywhere.

TEXT INDIGO WEEKS

