



Malik Bendjelloul's 'Searching for Sugar Man' follows the trail of 1960s folk singer Rodriguez

## Searching for Sugar Man

Malik Bendjelloul

86 mins (12A) ★★★★★

A head-spinning, signpost-turning, psyche-twirling treat: a music-culture Cinderella documentary to beat them all. In the late 1960s the Hispanic American singer-songwriter Rodriguez was a minor folk music cult with a sweet, strong voice, Dylan-worthy lyrics (some said) and a well-reviewed but ill-selling debut album. He was a hit in clubs with names like "The Sewer". The myth mill insisted he finally shot himself, or even burned himself alive, on stage. Why? How did it happen? And why was he, and is still, so big in South Africa?...

Swedish-born film-maker Malik Bendjelloul tells the story through two intrigued South Africans who sleuthed it first, a record shop owner and

"musicologist detective". They couldn't understand how a hero for apartheid-era rebel Afrikaners, a US singer who outsold Elvis in Jo'burg and told-it-how-it-was about the evils of authority and the high cool of love, peace and marijuana, had vanished effectively in his native country. What they and we soon learn has a cheekiness that is almost brilliant. There is more to Rodriguez's story than even his *notional* resumé suggests.

The film's real triumph, though, is that its hero is still at movie's end the partial enigma he was at its beginning. Was Rodriguez ever a Dylan rival, musically? We doubt it. The B-double-plus songs are easy-listening counterculture. Even so we feel, after learning so much about this supposedly short-lived music messiah, there is more to learn still: that the "searchers for Sugar Man" are still searching.