

IT'S A HAPPENING THING



Sugar sugar: Sixto Rodriguez in 1971 and director Malik Bendjelloul (inset)



How Sweet It Is

ANDY MORTEN on the improbable story of an unlikely superstar

Our love for Rodriguez's two early '70s albums is no secret here at *Shindig!* HQ – barely a month goes by when we don't reach for *Cold Fact* or *Coming From Reality*. So it was with real excitement that *Shindig!* attended the preview screening of *Searching For Sugar Man*, a new feature-length documentary chronicling the fascinating life and bizarre career of Señor Sixto Rodriguez.

Rod's albums are now acknowledged classics of the era – unique dispatches from the streets of Detroit delivered in a style somewhere between Dylan, Jose Feliciano and late '60s Motown. At the time, nobody bought them, of course, but a fortuitous series of events led to Rod becoming a superstar in South Africa, where his influence on a new generation of anti-Apartheid musicians and artists proved immeasurable.

We asked *Searching's* director, Malik Bendjelloul, what first drew him to his subject.

"When I first heard the story I was completely stunned. It was so strange and beautiful, like a screenwriter had made the perfect story for a feature narrative. But it was all true. I realised I had never heard a more exciting true story in my life." Malik and producer Simon Chinn had to scour the world to assemble the cast of

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players. "They were spread all over the world and some of them, like Steve Rowland, producer of Rodriguez's second album, had literally not talked about Rodriguez for almost 40 years. He hadn't heard a single word about South Africa and the fact that the album he

produced had become a phenomenon there."

When Rod finally makes an appearance in the film, his apparent nonchalance is startling; his reactions ice-cool to questions about the stardom and success he knew nothing of as they were happening. "I don't think Rodriguez is nonchalant about his South African success," explains Bendjelloul, "but I think he is pretty aware that what people perceive as success is not necessarily the only thing that matters. As the quote goes, 'Success is getting what you want, happiness is wanting what you get.' I think Rodriguez really enjoyed all the success he got, and will enjoy all the success he might have in the future. But he already has three wonderful daughters and people around him that love him, which is even more important."

Searching For Sugar Man opens in the UK on July 27th. The soundtrack CD is released by *Light In The Attic/Legacy* on July 24th