

# Films

BY MICHAEL BONNER

**THIS MONTH:** Cronenberg and cars, a contender for the year's best music doc, Willem Dafoe, Adrien Brody and a "kind of a Shins-meets-Sesame Street thing"

**C**osmopolis In the years since his last self-penned film, 1999's *eXistenZ*, David Cronenberg has become a shrewd adaptor of other writers' material. Encouragingly, Don DeLillo's 2003 boutique novella *Cosmopolis* shares many of Cronenberg's preoccupations – viruses, transgression, technology, madness, controlled environments. It fits, too, with the discursive, intellectual direction of his recent films. Here's Eric Packer, a 28-year-old billionaire, who travels across New York by limousine to get a haircut, on a day when the city is gridlocked by a rapper's funeral, political demonstrations and a visit from the President – "barriers set up, entire streets deleted from the map". In a wry piece of casting, Cronenberg's Packer is *Twilight* star Robert Pattinson, whose android handsomeness is perfect for Packer, recessed into the darkness of his limousine, eyes hidden behind sunglasses, splendidly vampiric. Packer, lost in calculations and predictions and currency markets, "acquires information and turns it into something stupendous and awful". Bored and distant, he asks, "Show me something I haven't seen before." He holds meetings in his limo with his work associates, has sex, undergoes a prostate examination. There is a "credible threat" against his life. The limo interior itself is beautiful, sleek and hi-tech. Around Pattinson, Cronenberg casts Juliette Binoche, Samantha Morton, Mathieu Amalric and Paul Giamatti – all of whom are excellent. Cronenberg lifts DeLillo's dense dialogue verbatim, his cast use a disconnected, stylised delivery that becomes increasingly hypnotic the longer you go with it. So, while this isn't a muscular genre piece like his recent triumphs, *A History Of Violence* and *Eastern Promises*, this very specific, very literal adaptation feels like Cronenberg's most experimental and thoughtful film for years.

► **Searching For Sugar Man** There's a batch number of high-profile music documentaries out this year – Kevin Macdonald's *Marley* and Joe Berliner's Paul Simon film *Under African Skies* have already arrived, with the Rolling Stones, the Stone Roses and Fillmore East projects yet to come. But truffle a little deeper and you'll find some less well-known but equally rich stories deserving attention. Chief among these is *Searching For Sugar Man*, a fascinating unscrambling of a 30-year-old mystery about Sixto Rodriguez, a Dylan-y singer-songwriter from Detroit who disappeared after his



A haircut to die for: Robert Pattinson calls the shots in Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis*

two albums tanked in the early '70s, but unwittingly became an unlikely icon for white liberals during Apartheid in South Africa.

Malik Bendjelloul's film loops through a number of strands – who was Rodriguez, why did he become so big in South Africa, and what happened to royalties from the 500,000 copies he sold there of his debut album, *Cold Fact*? Each gives up fascinating moments – reports that he's committed suicide on stage; a difficult interview with his former label boss (and one-time Motown chairman) Clarence Avant regarding the whereabouts of the royalties; a revealing tour of the Archive of Censored Material in Johannesburg. But the pay-off is a present-day interview with Rodriguez. Now aged 69 and looking like a Mexican Johnny Cash, he lives modestly in downtown Detroit, where he

still works "hard labour, demolition, restoration... it keeps the blood circulating."

Frustratingly, Bendjelloul's film spends too long on Rodriguez' South African success – the first hour is almost all interviews with enthusiastic SA musicians and industry professionals testifying to the artist's brilliance – that could have been judiciously edited to half the length. You sense that the sketchy but evocative accounts of Rodriguez in his absent years as "a wandering spirit round the city... not much more than a homeless person" merit much deeper investigation.

► **Detachment** If you've heard of Tony Kaye before, it's probably as the director of 1998's *American History X* – a film that assumed heavy-duty notoriety in its day due to the spat between

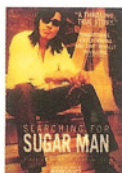
## Reviewed this month...



### COSMOPOLIS

Director David Cronenberg  
Starring Robert Pattinson, Paul Giamatti  
Opens June 15  
Certificate 15

8/10



### SEARCHING FOR SUGAR MAN

Director Malik Bendjelloul  
Starring Sixto Rodriguez  
Opens July 27  
Certificate 12A

8/10



### DETACHMENT

Director Tony Kaye  
Starring Adrien Brody, James Caan  
Opens July 13  
Certificate 15

6/10



### THE HUNTER

Director Daniel Nettheim  
Starring Willem Dafoe, Sam Neill  
Opens July 6  
Certificate 15

6/10



### BROOKLYN BROTHERS BEAT THE BEST

Director Ryan O'Nan  
Starring Ryan O'Nan, Michael Weston  
Opens July 20  
Certificate 15

7/10