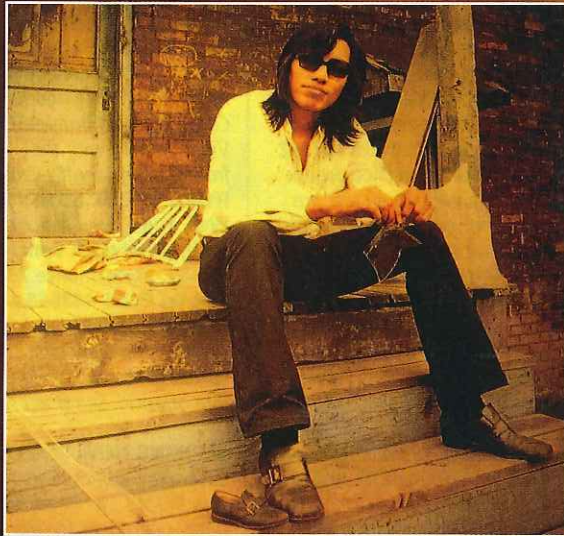


## Intriguing documentary charts musician's strange road to stardom

Searching for Sugar Man (12A)



**30 Weekend** From Friday, July 27, 2012

In just about every pub in the land, you'll find a washed-up musician eager to share their tale of woe.

Proclaimed as the Next Big Thing by the fashion police, they basked in their hipness for a couple of weeks until everyone neglected to buy their record.

You can be sure they'll all be flocking to this bizarre documentary to savour the sweet taste of vicarious vindication.

Back in the early Seventies, Detroit troubadour Sixto Rodriguez was poised for huge success. He rode the modish folk singer-songwriter wave, was compared to Dylan by excitable critics, and had record company money behind him. His debut album, *Cold Fact*, sold an estimated six copies. This being the Seventies, he got another crack.

The follow-up, *Coming From Reality*, also stiffed. Lurid tales circulated of how he'd committed suicide on stage while being heckled by a cruel audience.

In apartheid South Africa, however, Rodriguez became bigger than Elvis. Copies of *Cold Fact* were endlessly duplicated, its anti-establishment (and pro-drugs) ditties becoming the soundtrack to young liberal middle-class Afrikaners' solidarity with the liberation movement.

By the Nineties, record shop owner

Stephen Segerman and music journalist Craig Bartholemew realised that almost nothing was known about this icon. So they set out to uncover the truth.

Bartholemew wisely decides to follow the money, which eventually leads to a tense interview with former Motown chairman Clarence Avant. He makes the strange claim that Rodriguez failed in the US because "Latin music wasn't happening", despite Carlos Santana's enormous success and the fact that the only Latin thing about Rodriguez's material is his name. It's a shame the royalties angle is never pushed, as there's a can of worms waiting to be opened here, and we never really learn that much about Rodriguez himself.

Nonetheless, this is an extraordinary tale, skilfully told with a not-entirely-expected last reel bombshell and a great *Anvil*-style triple-hanky climax.

### Verdict

*A rousing, if occasionally frustrating, music documentary that will be enjoyed by anyone who loved Anvil or Marley.*

**Rating:** 7/10