

# Half a dozen of one, Sixto of the other

Fact and fiction intertwine as a pop myth unravels in the splendid *Searching for Sugar Man*

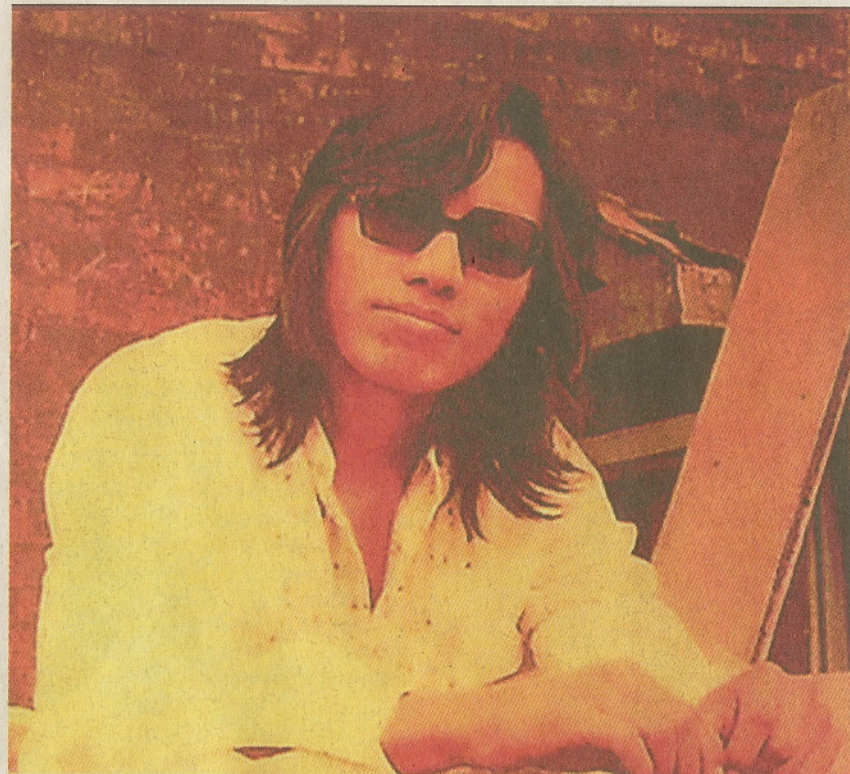
As we all learned from *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, there's a truth in legends that transcends mere facts. If you're still unfamiliar with the quasi-mythical story of Sixto Rodriguez (as most people outside South Africa and Australia apparently were until this award-winning documentary made headlines), then ***Searching for Sugar Man*** (2012, StudioCanal, 12) tells a story so seeped in intertwining fact and fiction that you may start to wonder whether the whole thing isn't a set-up. Which to some extent it is...

Having recorded a couple of inspiring but utterly overlooked albums (*Cold Fact* and *Coming from Reality*), Detroit-based Rodriguez bizarrely became a cult figure among disaffected Afrikaner youth in the mid-70s, enjoying a popularity on a par with Elvis Presley or Simon and Garfunkel. Having first made inroads into the middle-class party scene thanks to bootleg recordings, Rodriguez attained

folk-hero status among those who knew only that he had taken his own life after being ignored in the US – a powerful voice of protest snubbed out by corporate indifference. According to one version of the story, the unappreciated singer-songwriter had set himself on fire on stage, going out in a horrendous blaze of sacrificial glory.

Mixing interviews, music and inventive animation, Malik Bendjelloul's riveting film follows Rodriguez's cloud-covered trail back to Detroit, picking its way judiciously through the debris of archival evidence, following the money (at least up to a point), deliberately using the trees to stop us from seeing the enchanting narrative wood. On one level it's as knowingly manipulative as *Catfish*, the controversial (mock?) doc that purported to follow the wide-eyed infatuation of an internet romancer while clearly knowing from the outset where this story would end. Yet *Searching for Sugar Man* has none of the cynicism of that altogether more spurious journey, instead spinning its extraordinary yarn as if from a pre-internet age, relying upon the honest testimony of those who were genuinely cut off from the wider world, and for whom the cold facts of Rodriguez's life were indeed a foreign country.

No matter that the big reveal may be nothing of the sort – particularly given the high-profile coverage that



the recent rediscovery of Rodriguez's music has sparked; this remains splendidly uplifting and life-affirming fare, heartfelt and joyous in its love of its subject, unabashed in its desire to "print the legend". Extras include commentary and "making-of" doc.

The biggest problem with Paul Verhoeven's 90s sci-fi flick *Total Recall*, which had been through several stars, writers and directors on its tortuous route to the screen, was that Arnold Schwarzenegger never for one moment looked like "just another worker" (both his body and accent were exotic), so it was little surprise to anyone when he turned out to be a secret space agent.

**Rodriguez became a cult figure among disaffected Afrikaner youth in the 70s, on a par with Elvis Presley**

Len Wiseman's reboot, *Total Recall* (2012, Sony, 12), credits both the Philip K Dick story *We Can Remember It For You Wholesale* and the screenwriters of the 1990 movie, and benefits from an altogether more convincingly schlubby performance by Colin Farrell as the