

Truth Trumps Fiction Again in ‘Searching for Sugar Man’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on August 10, 2012 - 8:42am

- [1970s](#) [2]
- [Apartheid](#) [3]
- [Cold Fact](#) [4]
- [Coming from Reality](#) [5]
- [Detroit](#) [6]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [7]
- [Malik Bendjelloul](#) [8]
- [Movie Review](#) [9]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [10]
- [Rodriguez](#) [11]
- [Searching for Sugar Man](#) [12]
- [Sony Pictures Classics](#) [13]
- [South Africa](#) [14]



Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The old axiom “truth is stranger than fiction” is proved again in the unique story of a pop troubadour from the 1970s named Rodriguez, who produced two searing albums and then disappeared into oblivion. Unknown to the artist, he became huge in South Africa. The odd hope of Rodriguez is chronicled in “Searching for Sugar Man.”

The story is fascinating and truly unbelievable. The country of South Africa, lost in the midst of its relationship with apartheid, finds truth and energy in the words of a pop poet from Detroit. With the proliferation of music voices in the world, the one lone guitarist with a bunch of inspirational lyrics ends up soothing a nation’s soul. The captivating documentary revives Rodriguez and gives his old songs another deserved stage, and it is the story of the man, his family and his admirers on the other side of the world. This is a must-see true story for fans of music, ardent expectations and finally, redemption.

The year is 1968, in riot-torn Detroit, Michigan. An unknown singer named Sixto Diaz Rodriguez, AKA Rodriguez, is playing the stages of the Motor City. He is known for his mysterious air, soulful tunes and incredible lyrics. Two music producers, who had worked with Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder, thinks they have found the next Bob Dylan. They record and release the debut album of Rodriguez in 1970, the savage “Cold Fact.” The album garners good reviews, but generates no sales.



Rodriguez Today Walks Through Detroit in ‘Searching for Sugar Man’
Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

Another recording attempt was launched the next year – “Coming From Reality” – but again is received with no sales. The musician Rodriguez fades away, taking odd jobs in Detroit for the next decade and a half. Around the mid-1970s, it took a segregated nation on the other side of the world, South Africa, to appreciate and lionize the truth teller. Rodriguez becomes a sensation, unknown to him. When rumors of his death permeated the rock press in South Africa, some intrepid reporters searched for the creator of “Cold Fact” once again.

Swedish director Malik Bendjelloul picked up the story and created “Searching for Sugar Man” based on the reports of South African journalist Stephen Segerman and others. The veteran pop music documentary director was mesmerized that such a strange happening had transpired without any mention in America about the enigmatic Rodriguez. Without the proliferation of the information age it was possible for an artist in the 1970s to have a couple record albums, and then disappear if those albums failed to launch.

Rodriguez the man is a typical immigrant class pragmatist. His youthful passion and soul come out in his amazing songs, but when they didn't fly off the shelf and support him and his family, he simply moved on to take other jobs along the way. One of the funnier parts of the story is the disbelief his fellow construction co-workers have when they find out the skinny Mexican guy is a famous pop star on the other side of the world.



Director Bendjelloul uses the very spare archival footage and photos to effective degree, and augments them with animation, contemporary footage of Rodriguez and interviews with journalists, music producers, family and friends. Besides the story of the search, one of the highlights is the triumphant re-emergence of the artist in the late 1980s within the burning passion for his music in South Africa. He is treated as a returning hero, selling out shows and treated like a king. It's as if Elvis had been resurrected.

Another beautiful side of the documentary is that the music of Rodriguez is timeless and classic. He was described as a “Chicano Bob Dylan,” but there is more than just that in his energy and poetry. It's ironic that South Africa picked up on it, but not Rodriguez's native Detroit. Each part of those two worlds had its struggles with apartheid, and maybe Rodriguez could have delivered his tonic to Detroit as well as Cape Town.

In the third track on his first album, “Crucify Your Mind,” the lyrics offer “And you assume you have something to offer/ Secrets shiny and new/ But how much of you is repetition/ That you didn't whisper to him too.” It's almost like Rodriguez was writing his life story before it happened, which makes the purpose of his comeback all the more poignant. You, me and him are all “Searching for Sugar Man.”

“Searching for Sugar Man” continues its limited release in Chicago on August 10th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring the story of the 1970s musician Rodriguez. Directed by Malik Bendjelloul. Rated “PG-13”



[15]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [16]
Senior Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [15]

© 2012 Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

Source URL (retrieved on **Mar 28 2024 - 11:38am**):

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/19494/truth-trumps-fiction-again-in-searching-for-sugar-man>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/1970s>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/apartheid>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/cold-fact>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/coming-from-reality>

- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/detroit>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/hollywoodchicagocom-content>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/malik-bendjelloul>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/patrick-mcdonald>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/rodriguez>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/searching-for-sugar-man>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/sony-pictures-classics>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/south-africa>
- [15] <mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT>