Music documentaries came thick and fast in 2012, but this one was the best and easily the most successful. That’s mainly because it’s such an extraordinary story. Rodriguez, a Mexican-American singer-songwriter from Detroit, released two albums around 1970 which barely caused a ripple. But bootleg copies found their way to South Africa, where their counter-culture attitude found favour with anti-apartheid white audiences. No one there knew the first thing about him – indeed rumour had it he had died by his own hand – but he became as big as the Rolling Stones.

Unaware of his distant fame, this modest man scraped a living doing construction work. Only when two South African fans, a record store owner and a journalist, resolved to track him down was he “discovered” and began to enjoy his late-blooming success. It’s a heartening, uplifting film, touched by the shy, sweet-natured spirit of Rodriguez; you find yourself willing him to succeed. Director Malik Bendjelloul structures his story skilfully, and in a 30-minute “making of” extra, engagingly relates how he came close to abandoning Searching for Sugarman because he had run out of money. He emerges every bit as much of an underdog as Rodriguez himself.

David Gritten