

Cold Fiction

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INTRODUCTION

In 1971 an album called 'Cold Fact' by a little known Detroit based singer called Rodriguez was released. The lyrics on the album were gritty and poetical, not too dissimilar to Bob Dylan. However, 'Cold Fact', along with his second album 'Coming From Reality' sank without a trace and there is virtually no mention of the singer in any musical literature. Rodriguez quit the music business and went back to working as a manual labourer.

However, unknown to the artist, 'Cold Fact' somehow found its way to South Africa where it struck a chord with the youth there, particularly young white South African males conscripted to fight a battle that they did not really agree with. The album sold hundreds of thousands of copies, outselling the likes of the Rolling Stones and Elvis.

Despite this phenomenal success, no one in South Africa knew anything about Rodriguez or what had happened to him. Rumours sprung up about his fate, the most popular being that he had shot himself on stage after a concert. This was in the days when South Africa was a closed society and there was no internet.

With the fall of apartheid and the growth of the internet, a couple of South Africans embarked on a search to find out what had happened to their hero. They launched a website called 'The Great Rodriguez Hunt'. One day a message appeared on the forum on the website in which the poster claimed to be Rodriguez daughter.

One thing led to another and in 1998 Rodriguez flew to South Africa to play in front of 5,000 adoring fans who knew the words to songs that were nearly 30 years old. Rodriguez had never received any royalties from his South African sales, so he was as surprised about his fame there as his South African fans were that he was still alive.

This amazing story is beautifully captured in the documentary 'Searching For Sugar Man' which fills in many of the gaps in the story.

There are many theories about why Rodriguez was never popular in his home country and as many trying to explain how his music won the hearts and minds of so many South Africans, but one thing all in the know agree on, is that the beauty and power of his lyrics are what bonds one to this man.