

# An Audience at Last

continued ▲ from page 11

two ardent fans began a years-long search to find out what happened to their musical idol. Their enthusiasm for that search--and director Bendjelloul's enthusiasm for the remarkable story that attended its outcome--fueled the making of this film, which was itself a passion project that took years to make.

As it turns out, truth was stranger, and more interesting, than fiction. While his music was fueling the anti-apartheid movement half a world away, Rodriguez went on living an obscure working-class existence in Detroit, where he had grown up in a large Mexican-American family.

He worked construction and restoration jobs and raised three daughters (quite well, by all indications--they are a compelling part of this account). He maintained an interest in music ("I attend the shows," he says mildly) and in poetry and art, appreciations he cultivated in his daughters. He also maintained an

course -- but for me, it is more than that. Rodriguez is a truly remarkable musician with a prophetic gift, who went almost completely unnoticed until his mid-50s, and might well have spent his whole life that way. This happens all the time, particularly to people who are poor and come from underrepresented cultures. It is worth reflecting on how easy it is for a dominant culture to miss outsider voices who carry deep and prophetic wisdom.

Second, Rodriguez himself is a profoundly inspiring example of a person who lives consistently out of his deep core. The story has an odd, time-capsule quality to it; Rodriguez writes and performs a good quantity of inspiring and thoughtful music and then, when it seems no one is listening, weathers his disappointment and simply goes on living his life. He lives it well. And

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interest in philosophy (which he studied) and in politics, making an unsuccessful run for Detroit mayor (more evidence of idealism gone unnoticed). The passions that fueled his music, which speaks to the experience of dispossessed, persisted.

Eventually, as the film recounts, the combination of dogged detective work and the emergence of the internet enabled Rodriguez's South African fans to find him. His daughters recollect the surprise and deep pleasure of traveling to South Africa with him and watching their father step on stage to the deafening cheers of a sold-out crowd.

Watching the footage (much of it captured by his oldest daughter) is profoundly moving. His youngest daughter recalls a strange sense that they were watching him do what he was always meant to do, yet never imagined: he went "from being the outcast to being who he was -- a musician playing to his fans on stage." It is hard to describe the ease with which he accepts it all, as though he has been dealing with such crowds all his life, and yet also with unmistakable humility.

Which brings me to the two lessons that struck me most in this story. A once-skeptical reporter comments on how this story won him over in part because it embodies the deep hope that every person has -- that one day the rest of the world will discover and applaud one's truth worth. He is right, of

when his fans find him 27 years later, they find a good and decent man.

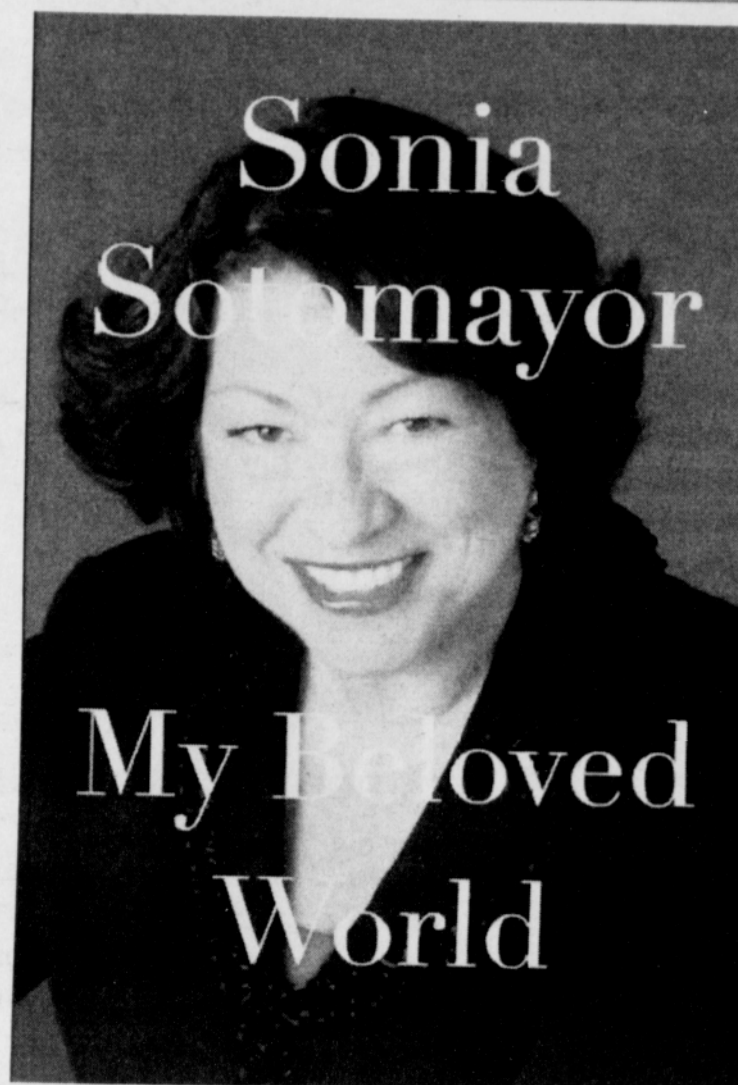
He is not bitter; he has not stopped thinking and striving and taking chances. He has passed on to his three daughters a good way of living, and it shows in how they describe walking through the experience of newfound fame with him. He is gracious and does not waste time wondering what happened to the royalties for all those albums sold in South Africa (although I certainly wonder about that). One of his laborer friends likens him to a silk worm, noticing that Rodriguez transformed his pain into something beautiful. As the friend marvels, who among us can say that we have done such a thing?

Here is rich inspiration for all those who toil in obscurity, with no expectation of ever being heard. The inspiration is not simply the hope that one will be discovered; it is the hope that one could live one's life so well that in some sense whether one is discovered is not the pivotal issue. Rodriguez responds to his newfound notoriety warmly, but he does not appear to be much affected by it. One might search a long time to find someone like that.

Darleen Ortega is a judge on the Oregon Court of Appeals and the first woman of color to serve in that capacity. Her movie review column Opinionated Judge appears regularly in the Portland Observer. You can find her movie blog at [opinionatedjudge.blogspot.com](http://opinionatedjudge.blogspot.com).

## Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

### Love, Self-Discovery and Human Triumph



Justice's memoir selected for Everybody Reads

Multnomah County Library has selected Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor's "My Beloved World" for its 12th annual community reading project, Everybody Reads 2014.

The first Hispanic and third woman appointed to the Supreme Court, Sotomayor has become an American icon. In this autobiography, she details her journey from a Bronx housing project to the federal bench. "My Beloved World" is a story of love, self-discov-

ery and human triumph. Despite having only television characters for professional role models when she was a child, Sotomayor resolved to become a lawyer. That dream took her from valedictorian of her high school class to the highest honors at Princeton, Yale Law School, the New York County District Attorney's office, private practice and appointment to the Federal District Court by the age of 40.

The book debuted at the top of the New York Times Bestseller List for Hardcover Nonfiction in early 2013 and remained there for several weeks. A Christian Science Monitor review notes "a surprising wealth of candor, wit, and affection. No topic is off-limits, not her diabetes, her father's death, her divorce, her cousin's death from AIDS."

According to The Washington Post, "Anyone wondering how a child raised in public housing, without speaking English, by an alcoholic father and a largely absent mother could become the first Latina on the Supreme Court will find the answer in these pages."

Extra copies of the book will be available at all neighborhood libraries in early January. Readers are encouraged to share these extra copies with friends, coworkers and neighbors.

Beginning in February, you're invited to share your thoughts at a book discussion at your neighborhood library, local bookstore or elsewhere in the community.

Justice Sotomayor will come to Portland to speak on Tuesday, March 11 at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall. Tickets are now on sale at [PCPA.com](http://PCPA.com).

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