

Aiming high: Youssef Kerkour plays Sami in the comedy Home

HOME IS WHERE THE WORK IS

YOUSSEF KERKOUR HAS THE C4 COMEDY ABOUT A SYRIAN REFUGEE TO THANK FOR MAKING HIM ONE OF TV'S MOST SOUGHT-AFTER NEW FACES, SAYS PAUL SIMPER

YOUSSEF Kerkour wasn't exactly short of acting work before he got the lead as Sami, a Syrian teacher and refugee who stows away in the boot of a family's car and ends up in Dorking, in Rufus Jones's award-winning Channel 4 comedy Home.

But it's testament to the show's success that the 41-year-old actor, born and raised in Morocco before graduating from college in New York and moving to England at the age of 23, has been popping up in all manner of classy fare since. He's been tapped for cash by a carol-singing Nessa in the Gavin And Stacey Christmas

special, taken a lead role in Netflix drama Criminal and has appeared in both Dracula and Sex Education.

'Rufus was the first person to say, "We've got to give this guy a more front-and-centre role," says Kerkour, phoning from Rome, where's he's on his latest job, a Sky Original Roman Empire epic called Domina. 'Previous to that I was always Third Big Guy From The Left. I have always been back-to-back with jobs but certainly Home has broadened the horizons.'

One of the most heartening aspects of Home's success for its creators has been the breadth of audience it has appealed to. Both Jones and Kerkour always hoped it wouldn't simply be a

case of preaching to the converted.

'I know people who are very much on the right of the political spectrum,' says Kerkour, who also pops up in C4 drama Baghdad Central, 'and I had those people contacting me saying how much they loved Sami. People responded to him - that's testament to Rufus's writing. He managed to capture something that was universal in this character and people responded to it - to the warmth and the hope.'

Being forever trapped in an exasperating situation is classic sitcom territory and for series two, Jones expertly turns the screw on Sami's predicament. Six months on from his initial application he is still deep in the

asylum process and separated from the family of Peter (Jones), Katy (Rebekah Staton) and John (Oaklee Pendergast) that took him in.

'Sami is not having the best of times, which is very typical,' says Kerkour. 'We push his comfort levels a bit more this season and show what it's like to see somebody crack under the pressure.'

Home continues tonight at 10pm on C4. Box set is available on All4



Home life: With (from left) Oaklee Pendergast, Rufus Jones and Rebekah Staton