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It takes chutzpah to name a debut *Shakespeare*, in part because it invites critics to complain that while subsequent albums might have their charms, they're no *Shakespeare*. Then again, someone who begins a second album with a track called "Rape" and ends it with one called "Shut The Fuck Up," as comedian Anthony Jeselnik does on *Caligula*, doesn't lack audacity. Anyone even vaguely familiar with Jeselnik's comic-prince-of-darkness persona should have a sense of what they're in for; if not, track titles like "Suicide Chunk" and "Offensive" should do the trick. Jeselnik has made free-floating misanthropy and a gleeful eagerness to offend his signature: He commands such a warped cult of personality that his audience would presumably be hopelessly offended if he *didn't* do rape jokes. They needn't worry: *Caligula* is chockfull of rape-based humor, but, as always, there's much more to Jeselnik's comedy than facile shock.

Shakespeare introduced Jeselnik as a black-hearted comic assassin whose methodically brutal one-liners play as an extended riff on the ugly entitlement of attractive, wealthy white men. In his stand-up, Jeselnik is less Tucker Max than *American Psycho*'s Patrick Bateman, an immaculately put-together sadist who isn't about to let morality, decorum, or the laws of society get in the way of fulfilling his every deviant urge and desire.

Equal parts provocateur and craftsman, Jeselnik is bravely comfortable with silence. His delivery is meticulous and methodical. He's unafraid to luxuriate in silence and anticipation before delivering a knockout blow of a punchline that takes already bleak subject matter into bracingly transgressive directions. On *Caligula*, the comedian toys relentlessly with an audience he professes to hold in

complete contempt, like a cat toying with a mouse before conclusively going in for the kill. Jeselnik isn't just after guilty, nervous laughter. He's after gasps of shock and horror, and he garners plenty of both throughout *Caligula*. By definition, *Caligula* doesn't have the novelty or freshness of *Shakespeare* (in that sense, it really is no *Shakespeare*), and there are moments throughout when Jeselnik's sensibility threatens to devolve into mere shtick. But if Jeselnik sometimes comes off as a one-joke comedian, that joke isn't just still funny—it's downright hilarious. As with **Maria Bamford's recent special**, Jeselnik starts dark and grows darker until it builds to a crescendo. (Both specials also prominently feature late chunks devoted to suicide.) But Bamford's darkness is intensely personal and real, while Jeselnik's is a product of his vivid imagination and clever persona. Jeselnik's set builds to the track "Showstoppers," but it's a tribute to the comedian's consistency that his showstoppers aren't too different from the hilariously pitch-black jokes that make up the bulk of his act. Most stand-up comedians are content to merely kill. On *Caligula*, Jeselnik isn't satisfied until he's left absolute carnage in his wake.