

A lament in music

Composer Philip Czaplowski needed a trigger to make his music work, writes Inga Gilchrist

IN ancient Greek, *threnodia* means "a song lamenting the dead".

Tonight, the premiere of Melbourne composer Philip Czaplowski's *Threnody* will mean grief about the loss of his mother, who died when he was 15.

The chamber orchestra Australia Pro Arte will perform the piece, which is part of Czaplowski's growing shift from music with purely technical strength to pieces driven by feeling.

Czaplowski says his immaturity and shyness at the time his mother died meant he coped poorly.

He struggled in school and at the Conservatorium of Music and says his musical career "just didn't take off".

"For nearly 20 years I really struggled because I would write a piece, get it played somewhere, but never really get any satisfaction out of it because it was really just a

technical exercise; I wasn't expressing myself," he says.

"About two or three years ago I thought 'maybe my opportunities have passed and it is never really going to take off for me'."

At that point, Czaplowski had an offer to write a concerto.

"I thought 'well stuff it: I've wasted nearly 20 years trying to do what everybody else was expecting and for better or for worse I am now just going to sit down and write exactly what I want to do, and bugger everybody else, I don't care what they think'."

Suddenly, he says, his natural musicality came flooding out.

"From that moment on, I thought now I am a composer because I am actually expressing myself successfully and by a happy coincidence people want to hear it."

Threnody continues the same development.

Once he had written the first



Personal loss: Philip Czaplowski.

minute of the piece, Czaplowski says it was obvious the time had come to write music about his mother's death.

The piece is about grief, and especially about loss.

It is the most personal composition he has written.

Czaplowski's well of feelings about the death made the piece easy to write, because he had something important to say.

"Her dying when I was 15 was a very traumatic experience ... and it is something that I've never really gotten over," he says.

"It had such an impact that it altered the course of my life really, because it just changed me.

Threnody is part of a long process for Czaplowski.

"When the piece was finished I realised that there isn't resolution at the end," he says.

"For me this piece is part of my life and nothing has changed ... There can't be resolution because I am still where I was at the beginning of the piece ... battling away."

Australia Pro Arte premieres Philip Czaplowski's *Threnody* at 8pm in the Melba Hall, Melbourne University. For tickets phone Ticketmaster on 11 500.