



'Alive and growing':
A *Tyrannosaurus* (left)
and an *Allosaurus*
(above), two of the 20 life-
sized dinosaurs created
by the makers of 'WWD'

birds will be heading our way
With Dinosaurs: The Arena
into Singapore at the
Based on the popular BBC
the same name, the multi-
"live" show takes animatron-
d form of puppetry – to bold

ogy, the makers of the show
dinosaurs – including the
of them ultra-realistic in ap-
rough state-of-the-art ani-
the dinosaurs' evolution and
d scale that's never been at-
tainment scene, and even
extensively used in mov-
first time the technology has
through the entire duration

cer and CEO of the show's
d: "Animatronics tell the en-
dinosaurs' 200-million-year
urs (WWD)."
ed to do the show, I thought
to thank you," admitted di-
believe the show's creators
-like dinosaurs through ani-
I walked into the workshop
e working on the dinosaurs

and saw one jumping around, I was instantly hooked be-
cause it looked so realistic!

"This show is as unique as it gets because nothing like
this has been done with animatronics on this scale," Mr
Paris added.

The use of animatronics in entertainment has kept the
technology advancing rapidly through the years. But key
robotic experts sense animatronics will gradually become
less whimsical over time as it combines with other forms
of robotics to find its way into our everyday lives through

mediums such as digital interactivity.

Xie Ming, associate professor at the School of Mechan-
ical & Aerospace Engineering, Nanyang Technological Uni-
versity, has been doing research on robotics for more
than two decades. Dr Xie noted how animatronics over-
laps both real and virtual space and has contributed to the
evolution of consumer culture, not just in technically ad-
vanced pop culture entertainment such as *WWD*, but also
in consumer electronics such as Sony's AIBO – a robotic
toy dog. He also pointed out that in recent years, the focus
of animatronics has moved from its origins in imitating an-
imals to now imitating human beings (androids).

It's this significant shift from what was once a frivolous
use of robotic technology that's also made various govern-
ment bodies here sit up and take note of the extensive re-
search in robotics that's taking place right here in our
own backyard.

Desmond Ng, manager of Interactive Media & Games
at the Media Development Authority Singapore, said the
organisation was actively on the lookout to support and
provide funding for companies dabbling in the area of in-
teractive digital media and augmented reality.

Dr Xie pointed out that the National Research Founda-
tion and Spring Singapore have various funding schemes
to nurture innovative ideas in robotic technologies, partic-
ularly in the development of elder-care robots which can
help us overcome the potential problems we might face
with an ageing population.

Human interaction

Adrian David Cheok, director of the Mixed Reality Lab
(MXR) at the National University of Singapore, leads a
team of over 30 researchers and students studying social
robotics which looks at human interaction with robots.
One of its projects, Lovotics, examines the feasibility of
human-to-robot or even robot-to-robot romantic relation-
ship.

"If you look at something like animatronics, the cutting
edge of that technology is how it combines with social ro-
botics to produce something useful such as making robots
that are realistic and lifelike so we are not afraid of them
and would be more willing to welcome them into our
homes," Prof Cheok said.

For the creators of *WWD*, the use of animatronics has
also moved beyond the purpose of purely entertaining the
masses. Embedded in the cinematic realism of the dino-
saurus is a deep educational value that draws an eager-to-
learn seven-year-old to it the same way it draws a curious
70-year-old.

"It's the sum of the whole," Mr Avery said. "People are
flocking to this because of three things: Firstly, the technol-
ogy because there's nothing like it in any other shows; sec-
ondly, it's authentic because you'll look at it and believe
dinosaurs have come to life; thirdly, there's a huge apper-
tite for education-based entertainment. *WWD* takes all
that and puts it together in a ground-breaking show."

The US\$20 million production has been a runaway suc-
cess everywhere it has toured. To date, more than 5.2 mil-
lion people have watched it over the past three years. It's
presented in more than 40 languages in over 200 cities
and grossed over US\$275 million to date.

In January this year, Pollstar named *WWD* the fourth
highest-grossing worldwide tour of 2009, just behind U2,
AC/DC and Bruce Springsteen, no small feat for an act
that only has science, history and robotics to draw a
crowd.

Educative:
Brachiosau-
ruses in the
show, in
which the
use of
animatronics
has moved
beyond
entertain-
ment



'Walking With Dinosaurs: The Arena Spectacular' will
be staged at the Singapore Indoor Stadium
from Dec 1, 2010. Tickets from \$38-\$148 are
on sale at Sistic outlets

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