

singaporeair.com

ENJOY GREAT FARES ONLINE



theage.com.au

THE AGE

[Print this article](#) | [Close this window](#)

## High, wired and handsome, Kong rises in Melbourne

Raymond Gill  
September 19, 2009

KING Kong is planning to take Manhattan again, but this time he's plotting his assault from an anonymous workshop in West Melbourne.

Inside the headquarters of animatronics company, The Creature Technology Company (CTC), a team of software designers, sculptors, puppet fabricators and mechanical engineers are constructing a "life-like" seven-metre-tall King Kong which, if all goes as planned, will be strutting the stage of New York's Radio City Music Hall in 2011 in a stage adaptation of the 1933 film.

*King Kong Live on Stage* promises to be far more lifelike than any film version of the beast because of the high-tech puppetry developed by CTC, which is best known for its arena show *Walking with Dinosaurs*.

Since its 2006 premiere in Sydney, that show, based on the BBC natural history series, has been seen by 4 million people.

*Dinosaurs* has clocked up \$250 million in worldwide ticket sales and proved a spectacular investment for CTC's owner, Gerry Ryan, the founder of Melbourne caravan company Jayco.

"But this is a huge leap from the dinosaurs because here King Kong is the key character who will have to command the stage and act alongside actors," said CTC creative director Sonny Tilders, who has overseen the beast's construction since CTC was granted the adaptation rights by the estate of *King Kong* creator Merian C. Cooper early this year. "When he scratches his nose, for instance, it will have to be done in one fluid, controlled motion where all the muscles up his arm will move at once."

The partially built King Kong is now a high-tech assemblage of steel, fibreglass, airbags and Lycra-encased polystyrene. When modelling is finished by late next year, he will be controlled by 70 cigarette pack-sized motors. His face alone will conceal 40 of the motors to communicate his emotions as he is transported from Skull Island to Manhattan, where he finds love with a young blonde and a precarious position on top of the Empire State Building.

*King Kong Live on Stage* will use up to five models of King Kong with each operated by three puppeteers using

Advertisement

Apply now for \$600 free brokerage

[Find out more](#) **CommSec**

remote technology called a "voodoo rig" from backstage. Finding trained puppeteers and puppet makers is a pressing concern for Mr Tilders and CTC general manager John Barcham. Both say they are outraged and angered by the suspension of the puppetry course at the Victorian College of the Arts as part of its controversial merger with the University of Melbourne and have written to federal Arts Minister Peter Garrett in protest.

The company employs 32 full-time staff and has had 14 VCA graduates working in its puppet fabrication department. The company expects to employ 60 people on its King Kong project by next year.

But Mr Tilders said the company's future in Melbourne and Australia was "potentially capped" by the lack of talented creative staff it could draw on. "This is one of our biggest issues; we need people with the skills and practical experience, but also the sensitivity to this genre," Mr Tilders said.

He added that the company had recently entered an agreement with US film giant Dreamworks to develop an arena show based on its forthcoming film *How To Train Your Dragon*. CTC is also talking to Cirque du Soleil about future collaborations.

"Melbourne is in the running to become the world centre for animatronic design and puppetry but it won't happen if they remove the puppetry course," said Mr Barcham. "Those people [making the decision] wouldn't even know there's a new genre of entertainment coming out of Melbourne."

*This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2009/09/18/1253209001428.html>*