



## weekendpass

# In the belly of the beast

**object lesson** Puppeteer Miron Gusso lives and breathes dinosaurs. Like, he actually plays living, breathing dinosaurs in Erth's "Dinosaur Zoo Live." The Australian theater company's interactive puppet show, coming to Strathmore, features eight dinosaurs, some other prehistoric animals and a host who provides information on the creatures. Gusso is celebrating his fifth anniversary performing as a Tyrannosaurus rex for the troupe, which this year is adding a new puppet to the mix: a teenage Triceratops. The dinosaur puppets get as close as possible to the real things — minus the possibility that someone could get eaten. "We work side by side with paleontologists," says Gusso, who suits up as the Triceratops for many shows. "We pick their brains and we take that information and go to the design table. We want to show not only how [each dinosaur] stood, but how we think it would move." KRISTEN PAGE GIBBY/EXPRESS Music Center at Strathmore, 5301 Tuckerman Lane; Fri., 7:30 p.m., \$16-\$58.

### Like a glove

The Triceratops puppet (don't call it a costume) is around 6 feet tall and 14 feet long and weighs about 100 pounds, but it's designed to be as comfortable as possible for the performer inside. While some of Erth's puppets are manipulated with the traditional hand-up-the-backside method, the Triceratops and the other larger lizards are worn. "It's built around a camping backpack," Gusso says. "We strap it on and there's support around the lumbar, around the chest and around the arms. When we're wearing it, the alignment is perfect. [actors stand with] shoulders over hips over toes."

### Legwork

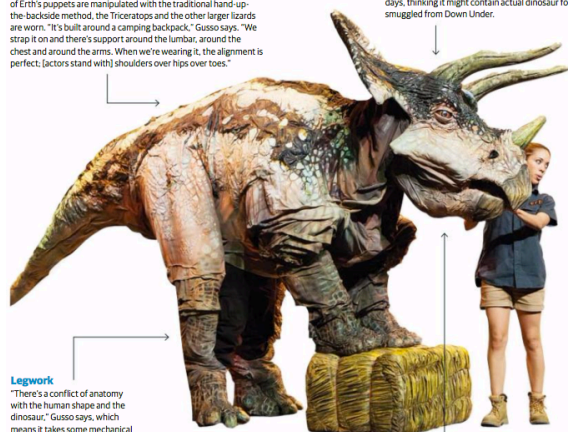
"There's a conflict of anatomy with the human shape and the dinosaur," Gusso says, which means it takes some mechanical help to get a two-legged person to operate a four-legged puppet. The puppeteer's back legs control those of the dinosaur; its front legs "are operated by these elongated crutches that almost work like an elliptical," Gusso says.

### Real fake

The look of the new Triceratops proved to be a little too real. When it was shipped from Australia to the U.S., federal agents held the puppet in customs for five days, thinking it might contain actual dinosaur fossils smuggled from Down Under.

### Hear me roar

The puppeteer also controls the dinosaur's vocals, some of which are recorded and some of which are real-time roars. "That control is particularly important, since the young members of the audience often get up close and personal with the giant beasts. "This is a creature that is larger-than-life, that roars," Gusso says. "When we're roaring and see a child that's a little timid, we can scale that back and make [the dinosaur] a puppy dog."



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