A lively and engaging walk through history for children

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Stones and Bones *by Char Matejovsky, illustrations by Robaire Ream, Polebridge Press, Hardback, $19.00*

One could be forgiven if, on seeing the cover of *Stones and Bones*, one became concerned. A picture of a dinosaur happily painting the portrait of a white-bearded man might send up alarm bells warning of impending Intelligent Design propaganda.

This is not the case, however; the man with the white beard is Charles Darwin, or a reasonable and amiable facsimile. The book itself is a scientific history of the world in verse, starting with a star burst and moving through the various Ages (Mesozoic, Cretaceous, etc.).

The verse itself is catchy, not giving in to simplistic language; mitochondria, for example, appears in one stanza and, remarkably, does not feel forced.

Now the study of the DNA
in mitochondria
lets us trace our common mother
back to Eastern Africa.

Char Matejovsky's joy in the natural world and the discoveries made about it are communicated in such a way as to be understood by younger children—and the dinosaur pictures by Robaire Ream certainly don't hurt in keeping the reader's attention.

Stones and Bones, importantly and unusually, offers the acknowledgement that not everything is known, and it handles this very well. The lack of knowledge in certain areas is not taken as a sign of defeat, rather it is held out as an exciting invitation to learn more, gather more information and contribute to a deeper understanding of the planet's past. All in all, a very exciting view of the scientific method, discovery and interpretation.

Ream's illustrations are charming—at once complex and clear, and work very well in providing further information. They also add to the sense of joy in finding things out. A great deal of "smart humor" is to be found in the drawings; in one picture a list of dinosaur names has "streptococcus" written in and crossed out, providing a little laugh for the kid in the know. Other names are misspelled and then put right—mistakes are a valid part of learning, it is shown, as long as they are corrected.

The book comes with a CD of the verse put to simple music and well sung by the Santa Rosa Children's Chorus. Included on the disc is the music to another song by Char Matejovsky, for which she won an award in 2004 for Outstanding Achievement in Songwriting (for lyrics, which are not on the disc) from the great American Song Contest. Both are charming, simple compositions.

The web site for the book, www.stonesandbonesbook.com provides further information for parents and kids, including resources for teaching and learning about evolution, biology, paleontology and other natural sciences.

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