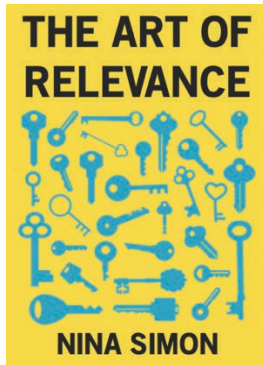


## Journal of Folklore and Education Book Reviews



*The Art of Relevance*, by Nina Simon. Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2016, 196 pp.

**Sarah M. Hatcher**

*Sarah M. Hatcher is Head of Programs and Education at The Mathers Museum of World Cultures at Indiana University.*

Nina Simon's newest work, *The Art of Relevance*, provides an approachable and accessible look at the topic of relevance and its importance to the work and livelihood of nonprofits. Although best known for her work in museums, Simon uses her latest book to consider relevance not only in museums but also in the wide variety of nonprofits whose efforts can be affected by relevance or the lack thereof.

Simon defines a relevant experience or organization as one that "gives you new information, it adds meaning to your life, it makes a difference to you" (29). This simple and compelling definition is used in conjunction with a "though-the-door" analogy to guide the book: You must get people to your door, but you must also get them into the room to truly engage with your nonprofit. And getting people through the door and into the room is just the beginning; the thing happening in that room has to be "brilliant" (55) and relevant to compel the user/visitor/patron to come back and partake again. Being relevant isn't a marketing campaign alone, it is about making honest and true connections to your constituents, colleagues, and community; it is about meeting them where they are and providing what *they* need and want, not what *you think* they need or want.

Relevance is an oft-discussed topic by those who create and conduct programs or lead

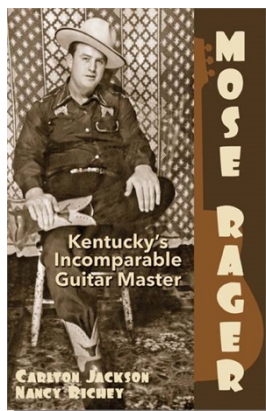
nonprofits, and this book is a welcome addition to that conversation. It encourages the reader to articulate the needs and wants of both the organization and those being served to ensure they are in alignment.

One of the book's strengths is the ease with which the reader can approach it—it doesn't take hours to get through a single chapter because the writing is clear and concise. The chapters are broken into many subsections—each clearly labeled—that address the topic at hand and illustrate the point using anecdotes directly from the nonprofit world.

While also being a strength of the book, the nonacademic nature may be frustrating for some readers. Simon briefly mentions the work of Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber to help guide her definition of relevance, but she doesn't specify which of their pieces influenced her definition. A quick Internet search reveals such information, but the lack of citations in the book could be considered detrimental by those looking for academic information on the topic of relevance. There were opportunities throughout to insert academic research to enrich the text further and make it a greater resource for students and academics in the nonprofit world. Simon is a strong, no-nonsense writer and her style would have kept it approachable and functional even with these additions.

Taken as a whole, this book is useful for those who work in the nonprofit world. The examples and anecdotes encourage the reader to stop and

ask the questions that really need to be asked but might be otherwise glossed over in the rush to do the things that need to be done.



***Mose Rager: Kentucky's Incomparable Guitar Master***, by Carlton Jackson and Nancy Richey. Morley: Acclaim Press, 2016, Cloth, 157 pp., illus.

**Greg Reish**

*Greg Reish is Director of the Center for Popular Music at Middle Tennessee State University as well as a record producer, author, and performer.*

One of the most distinctive, celebrated, and influential country guitar styles of the 20th century is the so-called “thumbpicking” that emerged from Muhlenberg and its neighboring counties of western Kentucky. A regional style rooted in the ragtime fingerpicking of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century African American guitarists and genteel parlor styles of the Victorian era, Western Kentucky thumbpicking offers a lively and virtuosic approach that intertwines syncopated melody and a steady, driving bass line played with the right thumb. The style became an essential part of mid-century commercial country in the hands of such superstars as Merle Travis and Chet Atkins and continues to flourish today. It is also frequently cited as an important, if indirect, influence in other popular styles, particularly through the Everly Brothers’ father Ike Everly and bluesman Arnold Shultz, one of the formative influences on the father of bluegrass, Bill Monroe. But despite their widely acknowledged importance, relatively little is known about seminal thumbpickers like Everly, Shultz, and Muhlenberg County pioneers Kennedy Jones and Mose Rager.

The late Carlton Jackson, Distinguished Professor at Western Kentucky University, collaborated with one of his former students, Nancy Richey, now also a faculty member at

WKU, to offer a corrective in *Mose Rager: Kentucky's Incomparable Guitar Master*. A slim and easily readable book, it offers a mere 74 pages of text in its main body, organized chronologically into ten chapters, plus a foreword by contemporary thumbpicking master Eddie Pennington, a generous helping of wonderful photographs (some never before published), a bibliography, endnotes, and an index.

In this short biographical portrait, Jackson and Richey paint a compelling picture of Rager as an extraordinarily talented musician who struggled with the darker side of life as a professional musician, which he ultimately chose to renounce in favor of community, church, and family. A native and lifetime resident of Drakesboro, Kentucky, in Muhlenberg County, Rager is presented as a working man and active local musician, balancing his job in the coal mines with a willingness to play “where anyone would listen, most of the time with a borrowed guitar” (40). The authors enhance our knowledge of Rager’s musical associates, the other pioneers of thumbpicking that influenced him and with whom he played, like Shultz, Everly, and Jones. The discussion in the first half of the book constitutes an illuminating case study of the