



## Ethnographic Study of the Royal Music of the Emir of Fika during the Convocation of Federal University Lokoja

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### ABSTRACT

The Royal Music of the Emir of Fika, a traditional Nigerian ensemble, plays a vital role in the cultural and social life of the Bolewa-speaking communities of northern Nigeria. Despite its significance, there is a dearth of research on this unique musical tradition, as it remains under-documented. Current literature on Nigerian court music concentrates primarily on southern regions, creating a noticeable void regarding the unique instrumental repertoire, ensemble structure, and ceremonial roles of northern Nigerian music, particularly the Fika emirate. The study examined the Royal Music of the Emir of Fika, and its cultural significance within contemporary academic contexts. It highlights the musical practices that accompanied the Emir's historic visit to Federal University Lokoja in October 2025, when the royal ensemble performed as part of the university's chancellor's night and convocation ceremony. The purpose of this study is to document and analyse the Royal Music of the Emir of Fika, highlighting its instrumentation, band formation and performance practices, function and cultural significance. The research employed a qualitative ethnographic approach, involving participant observation and audio-visual recordings of the Emir's music performance. The study reveals the unique blend of traditional and Islamic influences in the Emir's music, featuring a range of percussion instruments and aerophones. The findings of this study contribute to the preservation and promotion of Nigerian cultural heritage, providing insights into the role of traditional music in modern society. This research also benefits scholars, musicians, and cultural enthusiasts interested in Nigerian traditional music and cultural practices.

**Keywords:** Royal Music, Emir of Fika, Ethnography, Traditional Instruments, Nigerian Culture

### Introduction

The Fika Emirate, a traditional polity located in Potiskum, Yobe State, Nigeria, is home to a rich cultural heritage, including a unique and vibrant musical tradition. As a traditional state, the Fika Emirate is headed by the Emir, who is the head of the Bolewa people. The current Emir, Dr. Muhammadu Abali Ibn Muhammadu Idrissa, was inaugurated as the 43rd Emir of Fika on 12 May 2010. Although the 13th Emir, since the current Emirate was founded in 1805 during the upheavals of the Fulani jihad, the Emir counts as the 43rd Emir according to the traditions of his people, who

trace the emirate back to the 15th century (Daily Trust, 2013; Wikipedia, 2025). In 2016, President Muhammad Buhari appointed the Emir of Fika as the pioneer Chancellor of the Federal University Lokoja, Kogi State. This study focuses on the royal music of the Emir of Fika, specifically examining the instruments, performance formation, and function of the Emir's music during his visit to Federal University Lokoja in October 2025.

The royal music of the Emir of Fika is an integral part of the emirate's cultural and social life, reflecting the history, values, and traditions of the Bolewa people. Despite its significance, there is a dearth of research on this unique musical tradition, leaving a conspicuous gap in knowledge about the distinct instrumental repertoire, ensemble organisation, and ceremonial functions of northern Nigerian music, including the Fika emirate. This study aims to address this gap by documenting and analysing the royal music of the Emir of Fika, highlighting its cultural significance, instrumentation, and performance practices.

### **Methodology**

This ethnographic study utilized a qualitative design to examine the royal music of the Emir of Fika during the 9th Convocation Ceremony of Federal University Lokoja (October 13–19, 2025), with the Emir, Alhaji (Dr.) Muhammadu Abali Ibn Muhammadu Idrissa, CON, CFR, presiding as Chancellor, offering a key context for observing traditional Bolewa musical practices in a modern academic setting. Data were primarily collected through participant observation on the main convocation day (October 18, 2025), during which the researcher immersed in the event, documented royal ensemble performances, including instruments (drums, horns), rhythms, processions, and audience interactions via field notes, audio/video recordings and informal discussions with performers, staff, and attendees. Supplementary secondary sources included relevant ethnomusicological literature.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To understand the broader significance of studying court music in the Fika Emirate, this research applies performance theory, particularly as developed by Richard Schechner and Victor Turner (Schechner, 2003; Turner, 1986). Performance theory frames music not merely as sound but as a performative act that generates social meaning through embodied, contextual enactment. In this view, royal music functions as a "script" enacted in real time, where the ensemble's performance constitutes the Emir's authority, cultural continuity, and symbolic power (Cook, 2001; Stone, 2008). At the university convocation, the representation of Fika court music transforms the academic ritual into a liminal space (Turner, 1986), bridging traditional Bolewa heritage with modern Nigerian institutional life, reinforcing ethnic identity, royal legitimacy, and cultural hybridity amid multi-ethnic audiences. This adaptation highlights music's role in negotiating tradition and modernity, preserving the emirate's multi-ethnic heritage (Bolewa, Ngizim, Ngamo, etc.) while affirming the Emir's chancellorship. This theoretical lens enriches understanding of performative behavior in ceremonial and educational spheres, underscoring the relevance of documenting such evolutions for cultural preservation and scholarly discourse.

### **Biography of The Current Emir of Fika**

The Emir of Fika is the paramount ruler of the Fika Emirate, headquartered in Potiskum, Yobe State, Nigeria. His Royal Highness Alhaji Muhammadu Abali Ibn Muhammadu Idrissa Is the 13th and Current Emir of Fika. Muhammad Abali was born in Potiskum on 14 August 1956, the eldest son of Alhaji Abali Ibn Muhammadu, the 12th Emir. He attended Kaduna Capital School (1963–

1969), Barewa College, Zaria (1970– 1974) and Land Dowel Tutors College in the United Kingdom (1975–1977). He went on to North Staffordshire Polytechnic (1977–1980), earning a bachelor’s degree in Modern Studies. He later attended City University London, gaining a master’s degree from the Department of Sociology in 1983. (Daily News Pulse, 2022; Wikipedia, 2025a).

Upon his return to Nigeria, Muhammad Abali spent a brief stint as a graduate trainee at Owena Bank in Kano. He subsequently entered the Nigerian Security Organisation, where he served in several divisions—including Operations and Counter-Espionage and advanced to Senior Security/Intelligence Officer at the agency’s National Headquarters in Lagos. After resigning from the State Security Service in June 1991, he established a company that provides security equipment and services. From December 1998 to June 2007, he acted as Chief Security Officer for the Nigerian Railway Corporation, and later served as Security Coordinator for Total/Elf’s Abuja office.

Muhammad Abali received the title Yeriman Fika in 2002 and was turbaned as District Head of Potiskum on 28 February 2009. He succeeded his father as Emir in March 2009 after Yobe State Governor Ibrahim Gaidam chose his name from a shortlist of three candidates submitted by the Fika Emirate kingmakers. Though he is the 13th ruler since the emirate’s modern foundation in 1805 (during the Fulani jihad), he is counted as the 43rd Emir under the community’s tradition, which traces the emirate back to the 15th century. In April 2010, Governor Ibrahim Gaidam presented a first-class Staff of Office to Idrissa, who also served as Chairman of the Yobe State Council of Chiefs, in a ceremony presided over by the sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammadu Sa’ad Abubakar (Daily News Pulse, 2022; Wikipedia, 2025a).

Below is a list of Emirs who have ruled Fika Emirate

Start	End	Ruler
1806	1822	Buraima
1822	1844	Adam
1844	1857	Disa Siri
1857	1867	Mammadi Gaganga
1867	1871	Isma`ila
1871	1882	Mammadi Buye
1882	1882	Aji
1882	1885	Mama (Muhammad)
1885	1902	Sule
1902	1922	Disa (Idris) (d. 1922)
1922	1976	Muhammadu Gana Ibn Idris (b. c.1881 – d. 1976)
Aug 1976	10 Mar 2009	Abali Muhammadu Ibn Idrissa (b. 1932/37 – d. 2009)
16 Mar 2009- Date		Muhammadu Abali Ibn Muhammadu Idrissa (b. 1956)

(Source: Wikipedia, 2025b; Fika Emirate Council, n.d.)

### **The Significance of the Emir of Fika’s Visit to Federal University Lokoja in His Capacity as Chancellor**

The visit of the Emir of Fika to Federal University Lokoja underscores a broader cultural narrative in Nigeria’s higher-education landscape. As Adeyemo reported (The Nigeria Education News, 2025, July 2), the appointment of traditional rulers as chancellors of federal and state

universities sparks a national debate about symbolism versus substance. While the role is largely ceremonial, presiding over convocations and conferring degrees and academic honours, it carries weighty cultural symbolism that many stakeholders, including academic unions, students, and policy experts, see as a bridge between “town and gown”. In Nigerian universities, the Chancellor serves as the institution’s titular leader. This role is constitutionally enshrined in university laws. However, the position is frequently granted to traditional rulers such as Obas, Emirs, and Igwes, raising concerns about merit, effectiveness, and how such appointments fit into a contemporary academic framework.

According to the National Universities Commission (NUC), out of 38 federal and 49 state universities in Nigeria, more than 80 % have Chancellors who are traditional rulers. Examples include the Ooni of Ife (University of Nigeria, Nsukka), the Emir of Kano (University of Calabar), the Obi of Onitsha (Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria), and the Emir of Fika (Federal University Lokoja). While these appointments are meant to honour the country’s cultural diversity, their impact on shaping education policy or raising academic standards remains uncertain. The core governance of a university lies with three bodies, the Governing Council (led by the Pro-Chancellor), the Senate (headed by the Vice-Chancellor), and the Congregation (also chaired by the VC). The Chancellor’s only formal duty is to preside over occasional convocation ceremonies to award degrees, making the role largely symbolic and typically employed to foster national unity and cultural representation.

Supporters of the practice of appointing traditional rulers as chancellors of universities in Nigeria argue that it carries cultural weight. Professor John Iwuh of Redeemer’s University notes that naming a traditional ruler as Chancellor “helps bridge the gap between town and gown,” emphasising that the role is symbolic, aimed at grounding the university in its local context, honouring heritage, and showcasing national identity rather than exercising governance (The Nigeria Education News, 2025, July 2). In light of the foregoing, the Emir of Fika embodies this cultural bridge as Chancellor of Federal University Lokoja, embodying cultural heritage and fostering community ties while reinforcing the institution’s connection to Nigeria’s rich traditions.

### **Overview of Royal Music**

Royal Music is the music written for, dedicated to, or performed at royal courts of traditional rulers across different cultures and kingdoms. The music serves as the sonic emblem of sovereignty, weaving together cultural identity, ritual, and the prestige of the court (source?). Royal music, commonly synonymous with court music, refers to the sophisticated musical compositions, performances, and traditions developed under the patronage of royal courts and nobility. It served multiple purposes, including ceremonial functions (e.g., coronations, weddings, and state events), entertainment for the elite, and political symbolism to reinforce the power and prestige of monarchs.

In the Western society, this genre of music was often commissioned directly by kings, queens, or aristocratic families, with composers employed as court musicians or Kapellmeisters (music directors). Unlike purely ecclesiastical or folk music, royal music blended sacred and secular elements, evolving with the tastes of ruling classes and reflecting broader cultural shifts in Western society.

During the Medieval era (c. 450–1450), royal music emerged alongside church-dominated traditions, with secular elements performed by court minstrels and jongleurs who entertained

nobility through songs of chivalry and epic tales (Burkholder, Grout & Palisca, 2014). Polyphony began to develop in courtly settings, influenced by royal patronage. Key examples include: Hildegard von Bingen (c. 1098–1179): A German abbess with ties to noble courts, known for her visionary works like the chants in *A Feather on the Breath of God*, which blended spiritual and courtly themes (Fassler, 2008).

The Renaissance (c. 1450–1600) saw royal courts overtake the Church as primary patrons, employing large ensembles for entertainment and diplomacy (Atlas, 1998). Music became more polyphonic and expressive, with secular forms like madrigals and troubadour songs flourishing. Examples include Guillaume Dufay (c. 1397–1474) and Gilles Binchois (c. 1400–1460): Burgundian court composers under the Duke of Burgundy, bridging older styles to fuller polyphony; Dufay's motets and masses were performed at royal events (Fallows, 1982).

The Baroque era (c. 1600–1750), epitomized royal music through absolute monarchies, with lavish courts like Versailles commissioning grand operas, suites, and orchestral works for political display (Sadie, 1980). Composers often held official positions, innovating forms like the concerto and opera. For example: George Frideric Handel (1685–1759): Composed for English royalty, including *Water Music* (1717) for King George I and *Music for the Royal Fireworks* (1749) for George II, blending drama and celebration (Burrows, 2012).

During the Classical Period (c. 1750–1820), patronage shifted toward aristocratic estates and imperial courts, emphasizing balance, form, and symphony development, though composers began seeking independence (Heartz & Brown, 2001). Joseph Haydn (1732–1809): Kapellmeister for the Esterházy princes in Austria-Hungary, composing 104 symphonies and string quartets that defined the era's courtly elegance (Landon & Jones, 1988). Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791): Briefly employed by the Salzburg court and later freelancing for Emperor Joseph II, with operas like *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786) critiquing nobility while entertaining them (Eisen & Keefe, 2006).

In the Romantic Period (c. 1820–1900), romantic royal music emphasized emotion, nationalism, and individualism, with monarchs patronizing works that glorified their realms or personal tastes (Plantinga, 1984). Richard Wagner (1813–1883): Heavily supported by King Ludwig II of Bavaria, who founded the Bayreuth Festspielhaus; his music-dramas like *The Ring Cycle* (1848–1874) were performed for elite audiences. Mikhail Glinka (1804–1857): Composed *A Life for the Tsar* (1836) for Nicholas I of Russia, blending folk elements with opera to promote national identity.

From 20th Century and Beyond (c. 1900–Present), as monarchies declined, royal music became more ceremonial in constitutional contexts, focusing on coronations and national events, with less direct patronage but enduring traditions (Burkholder et al., 2014). Edward Elgar (1857–1934): Master of the King's Musick under Edward VII and George V in Britain, composing *Pomp and Circumstance Marches* (1901–1930) for royal occasions (Kennedy, 1987). Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958): Drew on English folk traditions for courtly revivals, including works for George VI's coronation in 1937. Contemporary examples include Judith Weir (b. 1954), current Master of the King's Music under Charles III, composing pieces like those for his 2023 coronation (Frogley, 1996).

From the foregoing examples, it is evident that, since time immemorial, music has constituted an essential and prestigious activity within royal courts across both Western and non-Western societies. This tradition is by no means limited to Europe; in Africa as well, highly developed court musical practices have long existed. In the ancient Yoruba city of Ile-Ife, regarded as the spiritual and cultural cradle of the Yoruba people, the *Ọ̀sirigi* holds profound royal significance as a sacred instrument exclusively associated with the *Ọ̀nì*, the paramount king of Ife. According to Ayodele (2022), the *Ọ̀sirigi* drum and its accompanying ensemble symbolize royal authority, divine legitimacy, and communicative power within the palace and broader community.

The *Ọ̀sirigi*'s royal exclusivity is most evident in its performative privileges: only the *Ọ̀nì* is permitted to dance to its rhythms, distinguishing it from other drums like the *Bembe*, to which traditional chiefs may dance (Ayodele, 2022). As a speech surrogate capable of imitating Yoruba tonal patterns and conveying proverbial messages, it serves communicative functions directed at both the visible (living) and invisible (ancestral/deity) realms. For instance, it announces the dawn each morning with calls to duty for the king, signaling the start of royal obligations and affirming his role as a divine intermediary.

During the annual *Olojo* festival, a celebration commemorating creation and Yoruba origins the *Ọ̀sirigi* announces the *Ọ̀nì*'s emergence from seclusion and accompanies his sacred procession, symbolizing spiritual renewal and the monarch's connection to ancestors like *Oduduwa* (Ayodele, 2022). The ensemble, comprising the lead drum and metal gongs played by an all-male group of 11 musicians, produces sacred polyphonic textures reserved for royal contexts, further emphasizing its sacrosanct status. This African court tradition, therefore, parallels the Western examples previously examined, demonstrating that sophisticated royal musical institutions, serving ceremonial, symbolic, and political functions, have flourished independently in diverse cultures worldwide.

### **Royal Music of the Northern Emirate**

In Northern Nigeria, the emirate system established through the 19th-century Fulani jihad and extending to various ethnic groups, including Hausa, Fulani, and indigenous peoples like the *Bolewa*, has long fostered a rich tradition of royal music. This music, often performed in palace courtyards or during public ceremonies, serves ceremonial, political, and social functions, reinforcing the emir's authority, celebrating milestones such as coronations and weddings, and invoking Islamic and pre-Islamic spiritual elements. Music has remained an indispensable element of emirate identity and governance in Northern Nigeria.

Aimiuwu (2015) highlights the *kakaki* as "the most popular and common Hausa music instrument to all the people in the North and the North Central," explicitly describing it as "a symbol of authority and power." This aligns with broader Hausa traditions where such instruments are reserved for elite contexts, underscoring music's role in projecting emirate dominance. These instruments also accompany key ceremonial events including coronations, *durbars*, weddings, state visits, and regular palace gatherings like the weekly *sara* (a public reaffirmation of the emir's authority). This music functions simultaneously as a marker of royal prestige, a medium for praise-singing that extols the virtues and lineage of the ruler, and a mechanism for reinforcing political legitimacy through public displays of hierarchy and patronage.

This socio-political role of music is vividly captured in Aimiuwu's (2015) description of northern Nigerian musical practices:

In other words, musical practice in the north is closely and seriously controlled by religious, social and political consideration. As a result of Islamic introduction to the area around the 13th century, the region's music is influenced by Arabic and Islamic elements. Serious musical performances are frequently held in the palace to entertain the Emir, and paramount rulers or chiefs under serious unadulterated Islamic culture. During such performances the Emir's visitors and subjects are entrained in front of the palace. In such occasions the Emir restates his religious and political authority while his subjects reaffirm their confidence in the authority of the Emir or chief and the acceptance of his leadership.

Aimiuwu's assertion accurately reflects the entrenched Islamic framework of Hausa-Fulani emirates, where music, far from being purely recreational serves as a regulated instrument of governance and social cohesion. In the context of the Emir of Fika's court, these performances align with traditional Bole and broader northern practices, reinforcing the emir's dual religious and political authority through ritualized displays that foster communal loyalty and acceptance of hierarchical leadership.

The typical emir's ensemble consists of long metal trumpets (kakaki or algaita), hourglass tension drums (kalangu), double-headed cylindrical drums (timbala or yanbari), and praise singers (maroka) who improvise verses in Hausa, Fulani, or local languages (Gourlay, 1982; Kofoworola & Lateef, 1987). The royal music of Emirs is characterized by free-rhythmic improvisation, pentatonic scales, and a blend of Arabic influences with local idioms. The Emir's royal music typically features aerophones such as the kakaki (a long, valveless trumpet symbolising royal power and authority) and the algaita (a double-reed wind instrument evoking celebration and grandeur), membranophones including the yanbari drum (used to proclaim significant royal events such as coronations) and the kalangu (an hourglass-shaped talking drum that mimics speech tones for communication and praise) and vocal praise-singing by hereditary musicians known as maroka or court griots. These ensembles, often male-dominated and patronised by the emir, underscore hierarchical social structures, with musicians occupying a specialised, sometimes stigmatised caste dependent on royal favour. King (2001) highlights the hereditary nature of these performers, who form a low-status guild reliant on emirate patronage, paralleling griot traditions elsewhere in West Africa.

### **The Royal Music of the Emir of Fika**

The Fika Emirate, located in Potiskum (Yobe State) and ruled by the Emir of Fika (currently Muhammadu Abali Ibn Muhammadu Idrissa, installed in 2010), exemplifies how royal music integrates Bolewa ethnic traditions within the broader Fulani-influenced emirate framework. The Bolewa, whose autonym Biya Pikka translates to "People of Fika," maintain a musical heritage rooted in Hausa-Fulani linguistic and cultural practices, featuring membranophone ensembles, aerophones, and rhythmic dances during festivals like Gamdo (harvest rites) that occasionally intersect with palace ceremonies (Fika Emirate, 2024).

In the royal music of the Emir of Fika, a dedicated musical ensemble comprising drummers, trumpeters, and singers performs at durbars, weddings, and state visits, as observed in recent visit of the Emir to Federal University Lokoja in his capacity as the chancellor during the

university convocation ceremony in October 2025 where the ensemble delighted the guests with spontaneous drumming, flute and trumpet performances, and dancing with the sword that also celebrated the emir's wisdom, power and his role in fostering unity. The Emir's visit to Federal University Lokoja showcases the ensemble's display and performances with kakaki fanfares and tambari drums for symbolic signalling. Two musicians sounded the long metal kakaki trumpet, a gesture that symbolised power and a display of honour for the king (Fika Emirate, 2025).

Thus, the royal music of the Emir of Fika illustrates both the continuity of broader Northern Nigerian emirate traditions and the persistence of local Bolewa elements, making it a valuable site for understanding how indigenous and Islamic musical systems have coexisted and mutually influenced each other over centuries (Omojola, 2012; Besmer, 1983).

### **Instrumentation of the Emir of Fika's royal music ensemble.**

This section examines the specific instruments that comprise the royal music ensemble of the Emir of Fika, highlighting their roles, symbolic meanings, and performance contexts. Focusing on instrumentation is essential to the article because musical instruments in northern Nigerian emirates are not merely sonic tools but potent symbols of authority, hierarchy, and cultural identity. By detailing these instruments, this discussion illuminates how music materially reinforces emirate governance, legitimizes royal power during ceremonies and preserves a blend of indigenous and external influences in a multi-ethnic context. The royal ensemble of the Emir of Fika, like those in other Hausa-Fulani emirates, typically features membranophones including the tambari or kalangu alongside aerophones such as the kakaki (a long metal trumpet symbolizing royal power and authority) and the algaita (a double-reed oboe evoking celebration and grandeur).

#### **THE TANBARI DRUMS**



(Source: Daniel Omaren, October 2025)

## Membranophones

Membranophones are instruments that make sound by vibrating a stretched membrane, and they play a central role in the musical tradition of the Northern Emirate. This group includes a variety of drums that differ in shape, size, and purpose. Most drums are hollowed from solid wood and covered with animal skins, though gourds, clay pots, metal tins, and other materials are also used. Some drums produce a single pitch, while others are tuned to play several pitches. They may have one head (open at one end, closed at the other) or two heads, with either one or both sides being played. The drumhead can be attached by glue, nails, pegs, or tension cords. Players strike the drum with sticks, their hands, or a combination of both. If a drumhead loosens, the pegs are tapped tighter or the drum is briefly held over fire to re-tighten it. The Hausa have a wide variety of drums that vary in size, shape, and purpose. The royal music of the Emir of Fika is led by the tanbari drums. These drums are reserved for ceremonial use and accompany the processions of Emirs and Chiefs. The “tanbari” is a double-headed, cylindrical drum played with a pair of sticks, striking both heads.



**Emir of Fika's Royal Ensemble performing at the Chancellor's night during the convocation ceremony of Federal University Lokoja. (Source: Daniel Omaren, October 2025)**

## Rhythmic Structure of the Drum Ensemble

In the Emir of Fika's ensemble, the rhythmic foundation is provided by three players on tanbari drums, each performing the identical ostinato pattern simultaneously. This unison playing creates

a powerful, dense homorhythmic texture, emphasising collective strength and regal grandeur, typical of emirate music where repetition reinforces hierarchical stability. The supporting layer features one musician playing two Nagara drums (hemispherical kettledrums placed on the floor), who improvises a complementary solo rhythm. This lead part introduces variation through syncopation, accents, and call-and-response motifs, interlocking with the tambari ostinato to produce polyrhythmic complexity, a hallmark of West African ensemble drumming. Excerpt from the rhythmic structure is shown below.

## Rhythmic Structure of the Drum Ensemble

Royal Music of the Emir of Fika

Transcribed by Daniel Omaren

The musical notation shows four staves. The top staff is labeled 'Nagara Drum' and has a 12/8 time signature. It contains a continuous eighth-note pattern: quarter, eighth, eighth, quarter, eighth, eighth, quarter, eighth, eighth, quarter, eighth, eighth. The three staves below are labeled 'Tanbari Drum' and have a 12/8 time signature. Each contains a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth rest, repeated every two beats.

A distinctive feature is the metric modulation: the performance often begins in compound quadruple time as shown above (e.g., 12/8, with subdivisions of three pulses per beat, evoking a swaying, processional feel suited to slow durbar movements). It then shifts to simple quadruple time (4/4), straightening the pulse for increased drive as shown below

## Rhythmic Structure in Common Time

Transcribed by Daniel Omaren

The musical notation shows four staves. The top staff is labeled 'Nagara Drum' and has a 4/4 time signature. It contains a continuous eighth-note pattern: quarter, eighth, eighth, quarter, eighth, eighth, quarter, eighth, eighth, quarter, eighth, eighth. The three staves below are labeled 'Tanbari Drum' and have a 4/4 time signature. Each contains a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth rest, repeated every two beats.

Concurrently, the tempo accelerates from adagio-like slowness (symbolising solemnity and

anticipation) to an allegro presto, building excitement and mimicking the escalation of ceremonial energy during events. In summary, the rhythmic structure features unison bass rhythm played by the Tanbari drums, superimposed solo played by the hemispherical Nagara drum, metric shift, and accelerando. This serves to dramatize hierarchical dynamics: beginning with collective restraint to honor royal dignity, then building to communal fervor that reinforces the Emir's authority through shared emotional climax. In the Fika context, this not only sustains Fulani-influenced courtly decorum but also incorporates Bolewa people's rhythmic vitality, exemplifying cultural hybridity and music's function in legitimizing power.

### **Aerophones**

Aerophones, or wind instruments, generate sound by causing a column of air to vibrate. In the music of the Emir of Fika, the most prominent aerophones are the kakaki and the alghaita.

**Kakaki:** Kakaki, a term from the Hausa language referring to a long trumpet, serves as a royal instrument in northern regions. It is traditionally employed for making public announcements, conveying war signals as a symbol of power and authority, and sounding the proclamation of a newly installed Sultan. In the context of the Emir of Fika's royal ensemble, as part of broader Hausa-Fulani court traditions in Yobe State emirates, the kakaki serves similar functions: it announces and accompanies the Emir during palace ceremonies, weekly sara (public audiences reaffirming authority), coronations or turbaning rites, Eid celebrations (including potential durbar-style processions), and state visits. Its role aligns with standardized practices across Hausa-influenced emirates, where the instrument is reserved exclusively for the ruler and performed by hereditary male musicians.



**Kakaki Player in the Emir of Fika's Royal Ensemble**  
(Source: Daniel Omaren, October 2025)

**Alghaita:** Another prominent wind instrument in the Emir of Fika's royal music is the alghaita, often referred to as "the bagpipes of the North." Although sometimes described as a horn, it is actually an oboe-like instrument with a circular reed attached to a metal mouthpiece. The alghaita is typically stored in a leather case. When played, the musician blows out their cheeks, producing an intensely piercing and striking sound. In the context of the royal performances of the Emir of Fika, the alghaita plays a central role in adding celebration, grandeur, and emotional expressiveness.



**Alghaita Player in the Emir of Fika's Royal Ensemble**

**(Source: Daniel Omaren, October, 2025)**

### **Analysis of the Ensemble Structure and Formation**

The royal music ensemble of the Emir of Fika, like those in other Hausa-Fulani emirates, is structured as a male-dominated, hereditary group of “maroka” (professional court musicians or griots) who perform under direct royal patronage. Typically comprising about 20 members (Instrumentalists, dancers and singers), the ensemble forms in a semi-circular or linear arrangement facing the Emir during performances, with aerophones (e.g., kakaki and alghaita) positioned prominently at the front for projection, membranophones (drums like kalangu and tambari) at the back for rhythmic foundation, and dancers integrated sideways. This formation facilitates visual and sonic hierarchy, symbolizing the Emir's central authority while allowing musicians to respond dynamically to ceremonial cues. In processional contexts, such as the Emir's appearances at Federal University Lokoja as Chancellor, the ensemble may adopt a mobile formation, with trumpeters leading on foot, followed by drummers and singers, adapting to the event's spatial demands.

Performances typically begin with a solemn introductory fanfare from the kakaki, a long metal trumpet that heralds the Emir's presence or signals the start of proceedings, establishing an atmosphere of reverence and anticipation. This slow, adagio-like opening often a unison call lasting 30–60 seconds serves to gather attention and affirm royal authority. Following this, the alghaita (a traditional double-reed oboe), introduces melodic themes that blend with the rhythmic patterns of the Tanbari drums, creating a transition into the main performance. Instrumental roles are clearly delineated to create a polyphonic texture: the kakaki provides authoritative fanfares and punctuations, symbolizing power and used sparingly for emphasis; the alghaita carries the primary melody, evoking celebration and grandeur through improvisatory flourishes that mimic vocal inflections; membranophones like the Tanbari and Nagara offer rhythmic support and "speech" surrogacy, conveying proverbial messages or praise through tonal variations.

The performance is divided into distinct sections: introduction (kakaki fanfare and slow unison rhythm), development (accelerando with superimposed solos and call-response between alghaita and drums), climax (full ensemble building excitement), and conclusion (decelerando returning to solemn motifs). Overall, the form of the music is through-composed with cyclical elements, often following an A-B-A structure where the introductory fanfare (A) is followed by improvisatory praise sections (B), incorporating metric shifts and accelerando to mirror ceremonial escalation. This form not only reinforces social order but also embodies cultural hybridity in the Fika Emirate, blending Fulani-Islamic restraint with Bolewa vitality for a cohesive expression of authority.

Generally, the instrumentation consists of 2 players on Kakaki (long trumpets). 1 player on Alghaita (oboe-like instrument), 3 players on Tanbari drums (double-headed, cylindrical drums), and 1 player on 2 small Nagara hemispherical kettle drums (placed on the floor). The ensemble is led by a cantor, who coordinates the players and ensures a unified performance. Importantly, the gender dynamics is masculine, consisting entirely of men, reflecting traditional norms in this context. The masculine symbolism highlights the importance of percussion and wind instruments in the Emir's royal music, with a balance of melodic and rhythmic elements. An example of the ensemble structure can be seen in the picture below.



Source: Friday 27th June 2025 Musical band of HRH Emir of Fika

(<https://web.facebook.com/share/v/1KD5QW3axM/>)

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### **The Sword Dancers**

Another prominent aspect of royal music is the sword dancers. The sword dancers are a key part of the Emir of Fika's ensemble, adding a visual and symbolic dimension to the performance. Eight young men perform a choreographed sword dance to the music of the drummers and horn players. Dressed in vibrant, multicoloured garments and caps, they wield long swords that move in unison, rising and falling in synchronised motions. Their bodily movements are fluid and coordinated, mirroring the rhythm of the music. The swords they carry symbolised honour and loyalty to the Emir, reflecting their role as royal guards.



**The Sword Dancers in the Emir of Fika's Royal Ensemble during the chancellor's night at the convocation ceremony of Federal University Lokoja (Source: Daniel Omaren, October 2025)**



**The Emir of Fika's Royal Band Performing at Federal University Lokoja  
(Source: Daniel Omaren, October 2025)**

### **Discussion of the Role of Royal Music During the Emir of Fika's Visit to Federal University Lokoja**

Music occupies a central and multifaceted role in the courts of Northern Nigerian emirs, serving as a powerful instrument for reinforcing political authority, preserving historical narratives, and facilitating social cohesion within the hierarchical structures of Hausa-Fulani emirates. Known as “*rokon fada*” (ceremonial or court music), it is performed during key palace events such as weekly “*sara*”, coronations, *durbars*, weddings, and state visits, functioning as a public display of royal power and a mechanism for subjects to reaffirm loyalty (Aimiuwu, 2015; Omojola, 1995). According to King (2001), Hausa court musicians belong to a hereditary, endogamous occupational caste characterized by low social status yet complete dependence on emirate patronage, with the emir and aristocracy providing sustenance in exchange for performances that extol virtues, lineage, and governance. Praise-singing (“*yabon sarakai*”), the dominant form, involves “*maroka*” (professional praise singers) improvising verses accompanied by instruments like the *kakaki* (a long trumpet symbolising military and royal authority), and *kalangu* (talking drum), blending Islamic influences with pre-jihad indigenous elements (Gourlay, 1982; Besmer, 1983). As Ames (1973) observes, these musicians act as custodians of history, “reciting genealogies and epic tales that legitimize the emir's rule while subtly incorporating adapted pre-

Islamic motifs under an Islamic framework. The kakaki, for instance, is reserved exclusively for the emir, heralding his arrival and evoking historical conquests (Aimiuwu, 2015).

This traditional role of royal music extends beyond the palace to formal state occasions outside the emirate, including ceremonial visits to institutions where the emir holds honorary positions. As Chancellor of Federal University Lokoja (FUL) since 2015, His Royal Highness Alhaji (Dr.) Muhammadu Abali Ibn Muhammadu Idrissa, the Emir of Fika, has made several official visits to the university, including convocation ceremonies (e.g the 9<sup>th</sup> convocation ceremony of federal university Lokoja which took place from October 13 to October 19, 2025), and project commissioning. During such visits, the Emir's arrival and participation in university events provide an opportunity to showcase elements of emirate court traditions, adapting palace music to academic settings as a symbol of cultural prestige, authority, and the bridging of traditional rulership with modern education. In the Fika Emirate context, this fusion highlights the persistence of Bolewa ethnic rhythms within broader Hausa-Fulani practices, projecting unity and continuity even in non-palace environments like university convocations or state functions.

## Conclusion

The royal music of the Emir of Fika, deeply embedded in Hausa-Fulani court traditions and enriched by local Bolewa elements, serves as more than mere accompaniment. It is a living embodiment of authority, cultural continuity, and communal solidarity. Framed through performance theory (Schechner, 2003; Turner, 1986), this music functions as a performative act that enacts social meanings in real time, constituting royal power, reinforcing hierarchical legitimacy, and creating liminal spaces where tradition intersects with modernity. During official visits to Federal University Lokoja, where His Royal Highness Alhaji (Dr.) Muhammadu Abali Ibn Muhammadu Idrissa serves as Chancellor, these musical practices extend the palace's ceremonial aura into the realm of modern academia, symbolizing the harmonious integration of traditional leadership with contemporary educational institutions.

Although direct documentation of the full royal ensemble's performance at university convocations remains limited, the Emir's presence at these events marked by formal processions and the projection of regal prestige invites the adaptation of rokon fada elements, such as heraldic announcements or praise-singing, to enhance the ceremonial dignity and bridge cultural heritage with scholarly achievement. Instruments like the kakaki and algaita, central to northern Nigerian royal ensembles, underscore hierarchical legitimacy and festive grandeur in traditional contexts, offering a model for how music reinforces power even in transposed settings. Ultimately, this interplay highlights the enduring vitality of emirate musical traditions in contemporary Nigeria, fostering cultural pride, intergenerational transmission, and the seamless fusion of indigenous identity with national progress. Further ethnographic research into such ceremonial adaptations could deepen our understanding of music's evolving role in bridging tradition and modernity.

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