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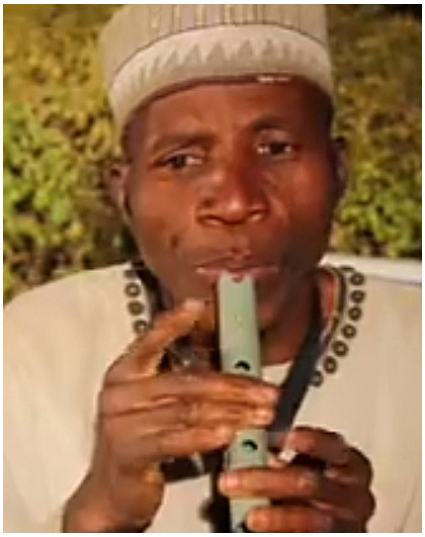
The *Kpàsãnãgi* (Flute) Player

The *kpànsãnãgi* is a Nupe wind instrument, a notch flute made from the hollow of a dried stem of guinea corn plant. About three to four finger holes are made on the hollow surface of the dried stem, spaced about 5 cm apart. The flute is between 20 and 25 cm long and is covered with decorated, red-dyed goatskin to prevent the cane from cracking by retaining its moisture.

The flute is played by placing the lower lip into the open air-inlet hollow pipe and blowing into the space, while the fingers select the holes by covering and uncovering them at appropriate sound positions, and sometimes closing the bottom of the hollow pipe with the palm, allowing the tongue to control the air pressure and movement that which produces the desired sound as the air travels through the hollow pipe.

The *kpànsãnãgi* (flute) player alternates between lower and higher pitches, blowing air that produces melodies, sound expressions, and tones. This instrument is widespread throughout the Nupe communities, mostly used in polyphonic wind ensembles. For the Nupe today, the *kpànsãnãgi* is one of the most important "praise" instruments. Its flexible melodic capabilities and high-pitched, penetrating tone make it well-suited for accompanying ensembles. Because it is played individually, the transmission of performing skills is more idiosyncratic. It is mostly played solo, and in an ensemble, it sets the pace of the music and the tempo of the performance. The player preserves rich cultural knowledge of the traditions of folklore, history, wise sayings, and proverbs in the Nupe language. It is believed that the skills of playing the flute is hereditary, and sometimes may be acquired through knowledge transfer or self-learning. The sound of *kpànsãnãgi* resonates with the spirit of the traditional beliefs and rituals, which mostly accompany the traditions of the Nupe masquerade ensemble. What is more appreciated is the sound and how the player manipulates it to speak, using it to communicate with the listeners.



There is unlikely to be more than one player in a group of twenty villages, leaving no space for a family of players. The income derived from utilizing such a large area may be considerable, assuming there is no competition, so players are usually unwilling to take on students until they reach the end of their performing life. As a result, the tradition may be passed down to a grandson or to any individual in the area who shows promise. The notch flute can accompany almost any major ensemble, but it is particularly prominent in the music for farmers, which uses the large *sala* drums. The player leads the ensemble, approaching the most active farmers to praise them. The same player can also move around as a free agent at a wedding, musically independent of any ensemble performance, praising local men. The Angalè ensemble that performs south of Bida occasionally calls the flautist from the neighboring village to perform with them, and during the Sallah processions, they are called as individuals to perform for noble houses. *The Nuba*, written by S. F. Nadel in 1947, mentions the use of the notch flute in the processions of the Gànì ritual at Kutigi, although this practice seems to have disappeared.

Today, *kpànsãnãgi* players are gradually disappearing as the few remaining artists grow older, with no younger generations learning the art. Perhaps the rise of digital technology has also made the traditional art of sound production more difficult. The flute player preserves the *kpànsãnãgi* by soaking it in water, then drying it in the sun to allow the water to drain. It is then lubricated with Shea butter oil and wrapped in cotton fabric to prevent fungus and insect infestations.

The *kpànsãnãgi* flute produces language speech intonations whose sounds travel a distance of many miles, serving as a medium of communication, entertainment, cultural heritage, and identity. Its sound capacity is highly regarded in Nupe communities, where its sounds captivate listeners, acting as a talking flute that can say almost all Nupe language words.

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