

PLAYLIST

# Kora Music



▶ **PLAY**

The kora is a long-necked harp lute of the Manding peoples in West Africa, found in areas such as Guinea Bissau, Mali, Gambia, and Senegal. Historically exclusive to the jeli or jali (known as griots in European languages) – a group of musicians, storytellers, genealogists, and historians – its roots trace back to the 18th Century in the Mandinka kingdom of Gabu or Kabu. Traditionally associated with royalty and religious practices, the instrument was primarily played by male musicians who would perform praise songs and recite epics.

## Welcome to the **AMA-Lounge**

The design of the kora consists of a hardwood neck, merging into a calabash resonator topped by a leather soundboard. This intricate instrument boasts 21 leather or nylon strings attached to its neck using leather tuning rings. The strings, divided by a notched bridge into two groups (10 on one side, 11 on the other), stretch over this bridge and are fastened below the neck with a metal ring. To play, the musician places the kora vertically on their lap, plucking the strings using the thumbs and forefingers. Its range spans just over three octaves and can be tuned by adjusting the leather rings at the neck's top.

While traditionally the kora held significant ties to ceremonies of the elite and spiritual events, its presence in contemporary music has been growing. Today, it's not uncommon to find the kora being played in pop music bands. Breaking with longstanding customs, women have also begun to embrace this historically male-dominated instrument, showcasing its evolution and continued relevance in modern culture.

- A compilation by Anja Weissmann, Lea Pulter and Hauke Dorsch -