

GETTING  
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## A SHORT HISTORY OF THE BASS GUITAR

The bass line as we know it can be traced back hundreds of years. For example, in the music of J.S. Bach (1685–1750), the bass line is as important as the soprano, alto, and tenor parts. In classical orchestral music, the bass line is played by the upright bass, or bass violas as it was originally called. In early forms of African-American music, such as ragtime and New Orleans jazz, the bass line was played by a brass bass or tuba. Because of breathing requirements, the tuba played a basic two-beats-to-the-bar rhythm. This gave early jazz and dance music an oom-pah feel. As jazz evolved into the era of swing (about 1935), musical compositions became more complex, and in the works of jazz greats such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Benny Goodman, a four-beats-to-the-bar feel began to predominate. Since the brass bass was incapable of playing this rhythm, the acoustic, upright bass took over the bass line.

However, the acoustic bass had its own limitations. It could not produce a large enough sound to be heard over the big bands of the period (often seven brass, five reeds,

piano, guitar, and drums). The acoustic bass is also very large and quite difficult to transport. These were the problems that plagued bass players until the invention of the electric bass guitar.

The modern electric bass guitar was invented by Clarence Leo Fender. In 1951, the Fender Musical Instrument Company introduced the Fender Precision Bass. Leo Fender had set out to invent the electric bass guitar specifically to solve the low volume and large size problems of the upright bass. He called his invention the Precision Bass because by adding frets to the fingerboard, the problem of playing out of tune was also solved. The original Precision Bass was modeled after the Fender Broadcaster guitar, first introduced in 1948. Although the original design was slightly modified over the years, the Precision bass has remained basically the same to this day.

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