Fretboard with 22 frets
Maple neck
Headstock
Ash body
Scratchplate
Separate tone and volume controls
Twin cutaway
Bridge guard
Pickup guard
BY THE 1940s, so-called big bands were becoming loud to the point where the traditional upright bass that had been borrowed from the classical orchestra could no longer be heard. Wildly disproportionate in size to its output volume, it was also becoming too big for touring bands to pack into their buses. Something had to be done.

American guitar designer, Leo Fender, who had been working on an electric version of the Spanish six-string guitar (which would later become the legendary Telecaster), applied the knowledge he had gained in electrifying the higher-range instrument to its lower-range four-string counterpart.

When the Precision Bass hit the market in 1951, it was one of those genuine moments of surprise, because no one had seen anything like it before. While the Spanish guitar had been evolving for centuries, the double bass hadn’t changed significantly since the 1600s. It didn’t need to as it was rarely used for anything more creative than the addition of sonic ballast, with the player rarely doing more than bowing the dominant and tonic notes of the scale.

Leo Fender literally revolutionised the design. He revolved the neck by 90 degrees so that any standard guitar player could recognise the format and adapt quickly to it. The advantage for the guitarist is that the bass viol is the only member of the violin family to be tuned to perfect fourths (causing purists to doubt whether it is a violin at all), which is similar to the bottom four strings of the Spanish guitar (only an octave lower).

The second design innovation was to make the fingerboard flat and fretted in order to give the player more precision (hence the name) when it came to intonation (while making the use of a bow no longer an option).

The last change was to have a direct output from the onboard electronics to the amplifier, meaning that the bass finally competed with the rapidly growing drum-kits of the era. Traditional upright players didn’t like Fender’s latest idea, thinking that it was a fad that wouldn’t catch on. Yet after a few years of acceptance reluctance, the Precision Bass was seen playing one in the movie ‘Jailhouse Rock’.

First made popular in the movie Jailhouse Rock, the Precision Bass has spent well over half a century at the heart of nearly every form of modern music, is one of the best-selling electric bass guitars and with its twin cutaway body and classic Fender headstock, has become a cultural icon.

Famous players include Roger Waters, John Paul Jones and Sting.

First mass-produced electric bass guitar

Original model had ash body and maple neck

Complete redesign in 1957 introduced split humbucking pickup

First made popular in the movie Jailhouse Rock

Now universally known as the P-Bass

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