**LOS CENZONTLES**

**Bio**

**Los Cenzontles** ("The Mockingbirds") is a California band, heavily influenced by Mexican regional folk music such as traditional mariachi and banda, Son Jarocho and son abajeno de Jalisco, Michoacán, pirekuas, rancheras, [norteno](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norteno_music), corridos, cumbia, boleros, and also country music and rock and roll. The band's core members were trained at Los Cenzontles Mexican Arts Center in San Pablo, California, where they also work training young people and promoting tradition and cultural pride.

Los Cenzontles was begun in 1989 by Eugene Rodriguez as part of a California Arts Council artist residency. The goal of the Los Cenzontles Project was to create a place for area youth to learn traditional Mexican music and dance. When students' training advanced, the original touring group of Los Cenzontles was formed to showcase Mexican folk music and focus on educational outreach. That same year Eugene met Grupo Mono Blanco, leaders in the fandango movement in Veracruz, Mexico. He established a long-term international collaboration designed to bridge the Jarocho and Chicano communities. Chicano teen members of Los Cenzontles traveled to rural Veracruz in 1991, 93 and 98. Rodriguez established the Fandango Project with support from the US Mexico Fund for Culture to create a residency to promote increased cultural participatino in California for Gilberto Gutierrez, of Mono Blanco, and photographer Silvia Gonzalez de Leon.

In 1994, 3 major events provoked Rodriguez to incorporate Los Cenzontles as a non-profit organization. (1) That year the recording of Papa's Dream, produced by Eugene for Los Lobos, Lalo Guerrero and members of Los Cenzontles was released. The recording was subsequently nominated for aGrammy for Best Musical Album for Children.  Eugene Rodriguez incorporated Los Cenzontles Mexican Arts Center as a non-profit, responding to spiraling social problems among local youth. That same year, 15 year-old Cecilia Rios, San Pablo resident and close friend of many of the Center's students, was brutally raped and murdered. In response to the tragic loss, the members of Los Cenzontles composed their first original work, *El Corrido de Cecilia Rios*.

In 1995, the group released its first album, *Con Su Permiso, Señores*. The group has released 18 albums in 18 years and have collaborated with David Hidalgo, Jackson Browne, Taj Mahal, Ry Cooder, The Chieftains, Linda Ronstadt, Lalo Guerrero, Pete Sears, Gregorio Hernandez Rios 'El Goyo', [Lazaro Ros](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lazaro_Ros), Mariachi los Camperos de Nati Cano, Carlos Caro, [Shira Kammen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shira_Kammen%22%20%5Co%20%22Shira%20Kammen), The Estrada Brothers, Saul Hernandez, Bobby Black, Bill Evans (banjo), Julian Gonzalez, Atilano Lopez, Grupo Mono Blanco and Santiago Jimenez, Jr. Currently, Los Cenzontles tours venues in the United States, Europe, Caribbean and Mexico. Los Cenzontles has also opened performances for Los Tigres del Norte, Los Lobos and Jaguares.

In 1997 Los Cenzontles Mexican Arts Center (LCMAC) sponsored the International Youth in the Tradition Festival featuring workshops and performances in Son Jarocho, [Conjunto](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conjunto), Mariachi and Banda. The five-day festival featured youth groups from Mexico and California and artists including Lalo Guerrero, Yolanda del Rio, Graciela Beltran, Grupo Mono Blanco and others. The Festival was sponsored by the US Mexico Fund for Culture.

In 2002 LCMAC received the Coming Up Taller Award from the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.

With support from the James Irvine Foundation, Los Cenzontles began developing a 3 part documentary series in 2003. The “Cultures of México in California” project is a cultural preservation/awareness project that explores the changing role of roots music and dance in Mexican immigrant and Mexican-American communities in California. Their first DVD, *Pasajero*, was released in 2004.

In 2013, Eugene Rodriguez was awarded a United States Artists Oliver Fellowship.

Today, Los Cenzontles stays close to its activist roots. The Arts Center currently has over 150 students weekly and the band members continue to do educational outreach in addition to their recording and performance commitments. The organization initiated a capital campaign to expand and renovate their storefront facility in 2012 and hope to complete in 2014.