



May 2026

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Composer Randy Klein and librettist Joan Ross Sorkin are proud to announce that they have been commissioned by the Margaret Walker Center at Jackson State University to develop a new folk opera, *Jubilee*, based on the novel by the esteemed Margaret Walker. The commission is underwritten in part by a generous grant from Yale University through the Yale Alliance for Scholarship, Collaboration, Engagement, Networking and Development (ASCEND) Initiative and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Concert presentations of the opera *Jubilee* will be mounted at Yale University, The Dome at Yale Schwarzman Center on Thursday, May 28, 2026 at 7:30pm, and again at Jackson State University, F.D. Hall Music Center Recital Hall on Sunday, June 14, 2026 at 4pm, presented by the revitalized OPERA/SOUTH in partnership with The Margaret Walker Center at Jackson State University, Yale University and the HBCU Opera and Musical Theater Collective. These concerts mark the 60th anniversary of Walker's "Jubilee," which launched the genre of neo-slave narratives when published in 1966. Students in music and opera studies at Yale and Jackson State will join opera professionals to perform the new work.

The opera is the real-life story of Margaret Walker's great-grandmother Vyry's 19th century journey from Slavery to Emancipation to Reconstruction, juxtaposed against the 20th century civil rights struggle, as chronicled by Walker's poems from her collection, *This Is My Century – New and Collected Poems*, bringing the continuing multi-generational struggle for equality into sharp relief. Some of the poems included in the opera were previously set to music and performed as part of Klein's *For My People Song Cycle*.

Dr. Phyllis Lewis-Hale, Assistant Professor of Music at Jackson State University, and Dr. Albert Lee, Associate Professor in the Yale School of Music, will be lead faculty. The opera will be conducted by the internationally acclaimed, award-winning Julius P. Williams from Berklee College of Music. Development of the opera will be coordinated by Dr. Robert Luckett, Director of the Margaret Walker Center at Jackson State.

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<https://www.jsums.edu/margaretwalkercenter/>

<https://schwarzman.yale.edu/dome>