

# Gainesville theaters light up with two new plays

By Michael Giltz

Gary Gordon is back in the political arena. No, he isn't running for mayor. Gordon has written a two-act political/social satire called *North By Mideast* and based in part on the Iran-Contra hearings. One doesn't have to wonder for long about where he stands.

"The head of the Contras is named Adolfo Hitlero — probably a reference to how I feel about him," Gordon said.

Coincidentally, another play connected to political issues is also being performed this weekend. At the Acrosstown Repertory Theater at 619 S. Main St. in the Baird Center, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, a drama dealing with Kenya in the '50s, when Britain still occupied it, is playing.

But Ajamu Mutima, who has the central role of Dedan, doesn't want to tag it with the label "political play." He prefers to call *Trial* a "moral drama."

No one would quibble with the politics involved with tonight's premiere performance of this play. Opening night will be a benefit for the Mighty Bread Food Bank. Tickets are \$4 on weekdays and \$5 on Friday and Saturday. The play will run until Oct. 10 with performances every Wednesday through Saturday.

Unlike *Trial*, Gordon's *North By Mideast* has already faced the crucible of audience reaction.

It was first performed on Sunday, Aug. 16 at the Thomas

Center in what was billed as a "One Night Only" show. However, Gordon was pleased and surprised by the public's reaction: "185 people showed up — 75 more than capacity."

"Several people mentioned that the community needed this," he said. Gordon needed to release his own frustrations as well. "I wanted to make an immediate expression of my own anger and the sense of insanity of what went on."

Still, he is quite aware how transitory "of-the-moment" political satire can be, and he has engaged in some rewriting in hopes of making *North By Mideast* more universal. Audiences can judge for themselves at the second "One Night Only" performance of his play, which will be this Sunday night at 8:15 at the Thomas Center. Admission is \$5.

The players at the Acrosstown Repertory Theater have different concerns. Written in 1976, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* has already proven itself to be of enduring value, and Mutima stresses its universal appeal.

"It is very entertaining — very community-oriented," he said. "It's very well written."

The playwright's name is Ngugi wa Thiong'o, an esteemed African novelist and playwright who has been called by *Africa Report* that continent's best-known example of the writer as political-dissident.

In Thiong'o's story, Dedan is accused of carrying a revolver. He



GENE PAGE/APPLAUSE

The cast of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* Acrosstown Repertory Theater on South Main Street.

is brought to court, and the author uses this arena to examine, as Mutima put it, "the injustice of neo-colonialism — and the universal question of the ramifications of exploitation."

Meanwhile, Gordon is practicing some dissidence of his own. His freewheeling satire is "much broader than the Iran-Contra scandal." It brings in pop culture and such hot topics as the colorization of old movies and the labeling of rock 'n' roll albums.

Besides the testimonies of

Oliver North and company, the committee hears from Woody Allen, Frank Zappa and many others. A light, witty tone is maintained throughout, but Gordon has serious points to make.

"There are crazy people in Washington," Gordon said. "And I use (crazy) to mean actually insane. *North By Mideast* is, in part, to point out the insanity that actually exists."

Both men speak of the satisfaction of working with tireless fellow actors (too numerous to men-

tion) who have devoted their time and energy to these endeavors.

"That's the beauty of it — the process. That makes me happy," Mutima said. "We started four weeks ago, and we've taken only one night off."

Tonight is opening night for *Trial*. Mutima is sure it will strike a sympathetic chord in the audience. "It's the human aspect that we can identify with," he said. "It doesn't matter if you're black or white if you're exploiting someone."