Dancers to begin three-day performance

by Elizabeth Freund

The university’s ballet company, “A Company of Dancers,” will perform tonight through April 20 at the Witherspoon Concert Hall, Joslyn Art Museum.

The company will perform a variety of ballets, including two by guest choreographers Seako Ichinohe and Kenneth Melville.

Valerie Roche, company director and head of the dance division of the department of Fine and Performing Arts, created “A Veaumarche,” a ballet simulating the day-to-day happenings in a French market in the late 1800’s. Principal dancers for the presentation are Christopher Batenhurst and Elizabeth Nelson.

Joellen Meglin, instructor of Fine Arts, choreographed the modern dance piece “Cartoon” for this year’s spring concert. Batenhurst and Mary Martin are principal dancers for this jazz piece.

“A Gift from Japan” was created by Ichinohe, a native of Japan, as a special tribute to the Japanese exchange program.

Ichinohe lives in New York and is founder and director of the ballet company “Seako Ichinohe and Company.”

The four-part ballet is based on Japanese folklore.

Quiet and serene, the first segment is titled “Floating Paper Dolls.” Three female dancers attired in colorful kimonos portray dolls which, according to Japanese custom, are annually sent down the river in baskets to carry the ailments afflicting the village children out to sea.

The second part, “Little Wooden Birds,” comes from the spring tradition in which peasants carve birds out of wood and distribute the birds out to a crowd. A priest secretly places one golden bird among the wooden birds. The peasant who receives this golden bird supposedly will become wealthy.

“Puppet Heads” is based on the Japanese puppet theater. The role of a villain, a ghost, a laughing girl and beauty are executed in mime and dance.

The fourth segment, “Kites,” displays the Japanese art of kite flying. The props are colorful and the atmosphere is joyous.

Ethnic quality

“A Gift from Japan” is different and adds the ethnic quality of Japan to the concert, Roche said.

Melville, an Englishman, is a freelance choreographer and director of ballet at Barat College in Lake Forest.

According to Roche, this is not the first time Melville choreographed for Creighton. Two years ago, he choreographed “Sorree” for the company.

“Melville choreographs beautiful, purely classical ballets,” Roche said. “They are very difficult to choreograph and to dance.”

In classic pointed shoes, the performers also will dance to the music of Tchaikovsky in “Tchaikovsky’s Suite.” Principal dancers for this piece are Sandy Organ, Brian Bender, Mary Beth Quinn and Petra Foss.

“Melville came to Creighton in January of this year to set his piece and then Patti Zukaitis and I practiced it,” Roche said.