The Joffrey Ballet’s Sunday night gala was peppered with devices to herd 800 party-goers from a performance to a dinner, all the while keeping the evening on a manageable schedule.

Among the secrets: Champagne, trolleys and drive-through drinks.

The logistics, shaped after several years of trial and error, began at the Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University with a performance chosen to last 51 minutes but still offer an ample taste of the Joffrey’s repertoire. Time-consuming, yes, but “For someone to go to the gala and not experience (the art) would defeat the purpose for us,” said Christopher Clinton Conway, Joffrey’s executive director.

Tickets weren’t mailed to guests. Instead, everyone picked them up at the theater. In the past, forgotten tickets caused a time-consuming traffic jam at the box office. “When people are getting dressed at home, tickets are the last thing they remember,” Mr. Conway said.
Yet another time-saver: A single glass of champagne for each guest - not cocktails - before the performance. They switched last year after Mr. Conway grew tired of breaking up cocktail klatches to hustle guests to their seats. “They were having too much fun in the lobby with their friends,” he recalled.

By 6:30 p.m., guests were seated in the theater for the performance, which started about seven minutes late due to technical issues. Artistic Director Ashley Wheater gave a two-minute welcome before the first number. That piece, George Balanchine’s “Stars and Stripes,” doubled as a salute to the Joffrey Women’s Board, which was celebrating its 10th anniversary.

The six-piece performance included a new work called “Chaos,” performed by Strobel Step Up, the company’s scholarship program for high school dancers, and finished with selections from “Don Quixote.”

After the bows and bouquets, guests headed outside, where trolleys waited to carry them to dinner four blocks north at the Palmer House Hilton. The trolleys cost about $10,000, a necessary expense. A few years ago, they didn’t hire the trolleys and “There was a near riot,” Mr. Conway said.

To speed up cocktail hour, guests grabbed Champagne, wine and sparkling water from Palmer House waiters as they stood in line for the elevator to the ballroom. Once there, the ballroom doors were open and the salad course was waiting. Both silently invited guests to take their seats so dinner could begin at 8 p.m.

But many guests appeared more eager to talk than eat. Despite two pleas to be seated, throngs stood chatting in the ballroom, delaying dinner - and a program of a video, speeches and awards - by nearly a half-hour.

By 8:30 p.m., most were seated and dining on a deconstructed caprese salad, beef tenderloin and, for dessert, peach mousse stuffed into a pink-chocolate ballet slipper. After dinner and the program wrapped at 10 p.m., a number of guests headed to the hotel’s mezzanine level to dance and drink at an afterparty.

The gala grossed more than $1.2 million for the Joffrey Ballet’s general fund.