THE world has had few genuine prodigies of the piano. Mozart was one, having made his mark as a concert pianist at the age of six, 125 years ago. Sixty years later Franz Liszt captured the attention of the European public. Rubinstein and Mendels­ sohn were piano wunderkind in their turn, but no one more truly deserves the sobriquet of "wunderkind" than Josef Hofmann, who celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his debut in America as a concert pianist at a golden jubilee concert at the Metropolitan Opera House recently.

Born in Orawka, Poland, Hofmann was playing the piano at three and a half years old. At five he had made his professional debut. Six months after he acquired his first piano, Hofmann gave his father, Casimir Hofmann, then conductor of the Warsaw Opera, an original manuscript for a birthday present. His first public appearance was at a charity concert and his father was promptly over­ whelmed with offers for concert appearances for the boy. But the father and the mother, the latter famous a generation ago as Mathilde Wynoecksa, the opera singer, were more anxious for the boy's health than to exhibit him as a prodigy and permitted him to make very few public appearances.

THOSE few appearances attracted an unprecedented amount of attention. When Hofmann was only seven,安东 Rubinstein heard him play in Warsaw and was so greatly impressed that he referred to him as "a boy such as the history of music had never before produced." When Josef was eight, his father for the first time yielded to pressure to allow the boy to make a public appearance. Under professional management, his debut took place at a matinée in Berlin's largest concert hall with the Philharmonic Orchestra. This concert was a modest success, but it was evident that the boy pianist had an extraordinary memory as well as a special gift for detecting musical inaccuracies. At his first rehearsal he not only played the First Beethoven Concerto from memory, but after it was completed went to the conductor and said to him in French: "The cellos were not correct in the last passage; it should go so." And he played the passage on the piano for the astonished conductor who found, on examining the music, that the boy was right.

His Berlin triumph attracted attention throughout the Continent and the next few years he was travelling to Denmark, Norway and Sweden, giving concerts under the patronage of the Queen of Denmark. On his return to Berlin he played at a concert in the Royal Opera House in the presence of the Emperor. Invited to appear in Paris, he found himself in the company of such noted composers as Camille Saint-Saëns, Ambroise Thomas and Berlioz. It was in Paris that Rubinstein again heard Hofmann and on more than one occasion exclaimed: "I am the greatest wonder of the present age."

AFTER completing his sensational European tour, Hofmann, then ten years old, came to America to make his debut in the country which was to become his home. Hofmann was promised twenty-five cents by his parents for each concert he played. On one occasion when he had finished his program and encores were demanded he refused to play, saying: "The concert is over, and I have earned my quarter."

Later, of course, he returned to the stage, but in the artists' room he remarked to his father, "In the future you must pay me by the pound. You do not have to promise me twenty-five cents by your concert for each I pass." The following night he took the musical world by storm, playing a long and difficult programme of solo numbers and selections with the orchestra as a critical capacity audience listened enraptured. Members of the audience were invited to suggest themes upon which the boy would improvise, and among those who did so was Walter Damrose. Although he was so tiny at that time that his feet did not reach the pedals and special pedal extensions had to be built for him, his catness, poise and dignity on the platform astonished every­body.

WITHIN three months of his American debut Hofmann had played 18 concerts at the Metropolitan Opera House and 24 on tour. Although 40 more appearances had been booked for him, his parents decided to cancel the rest of the tour, feeling that it was more important to conserve his health than to add to his fame as a pianist. At this point in his career a patron, then an extra and but afterwards disclosed to be the late Alfred Corning Clarke, of New York, offered to provide for the child's entire family, so that the senior Hofmann might devote his full attention to guiding the young musical genius. And in the patronage of his unknown benefactor, Hofmann returned to Europe to continue his musical education during the formative years. He returned again the United States and has toured there almost every season since. In 1928 he became an American citizen. Besides his vast activities as a concert pianist, Hofmann has been director of the Philadelphia Musical Fund and has spent all the time he could find in Philadelphia since 1926, and also its instructor of piano. Remembering his own youthful days, he has always been keenly interested in the careers of young musicians and is one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the Musicians' Emergency Fund, to which the proceeds of his golden jubilee concert will go.

Among those who were in the audience at the Metropolitan Opera House when Hofmann, at the peak of his career, walked on to the stage where his little feet had trod fifty years ago, was his mother, now 84 years old. Despite frequent persuasions, Mrs. Hofmann has permitted her father to cross the ocean to keep her from America since that memorable day in 1887 when she stood nervously in the wings of the open house awaiting the end of her seven-year-old son's American debut.

More than half a century has elapsed since the day when Rubinstein, who was giving his seven great historical concerts in London, was told of a newly discovered infant prodigy. Shaking his head he said did he not, as a rule, believe in these wonderful children, though he admitted having heard of such boys as the history of music had never before produced. And excitedly striking the piano which stood beside him, the maestro exclaimed, "And the name of this young rascal is Josef Hofmann." Rubinstein's verdict has been upheld by two generations of music lovers. To-day Hofmann is universally recog­ nised as the peer of pianists—the modern Rubinstein.