

Prince Nicolaus Esterházy “The Magnificent” is well-known as the creator of the “fairy-world” of Eszterháza, and as a musically competent and theatre-loving aristocrat who ensured nearly ideal circumstances for Haydn’s creative work during a period of almost three decades. Other facets of Nicolaus’s personality, however, remain mostly unknown. Just to mention a few of them: he was a full-blooded, extremely widely-read intellectual; he also went in for painting in his youth; he showed much empathy to people in his environment who were in trouble, and possessed an astonishing level of social sensitivity; he demanded strict discipline, especially in financial matters, but his good heart often defeated his harshness; and, as one of his contemporaries put it, he preferred to “live according to the desire of his heart.” On the other hand, he suffered from serious seizures of depression, he may have been involved in gambling in his younger years, and his marriage does not seem to have been very harmonious. To commemorate the 300th anniversary of his birth, this article attempts to more fully flesh out his portrait.