12 COMPOSITIONS FOR 10 STRING GUITAR IN YEPES TUNING

GILBERT ISBIN

Gilbert Isbin ©

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INTRODUCTION TO 12 COMPOSITIONS FOR 10 STRING GUITAR (YEPES TUNING)

In the early 1960s, when Narciso Yepes turned to the guitar makers, José Ramirez III and Paulino Bernabe, to create his version of the 10-string guitar, he did not have in mind a new body of dedicated contemporary compositions. His reason for creating the instrument was to allow sympathetic resonance for the full chromatic scale (more on that below). But it was not long before composers started writing new compositions for the new instrument and its very specific tuning.

When I bought my 10-string guitar in 2018, it seemed natural to me to ask Gilbert Isbin to write new works for me to play. Gilbert had already written me numerous compositions for the plectrum-played acoustic guitar, and a series of pieces for fretless bass[1]. I knew the level of his professionalism, his poetic spirit, and his mastery of compositional technique. His music combines elements from across the spectrum of classical, jazz, folk and world musics, without ever reverting to pastiche. His voice is strong and unique, and I am happy to be associated with his work.

What is Yepes Tuning?

On a six-string guitar, if you play the open first string, then suddenly stop it ringing, you will hear sympathetic resonance from the other strings, especially the fifth and sixth. Do the same with the note F, and there will be no sympathetic resonance. Therefore , the guitar's sonority is biased towards the open strings. The great classical guitarist, Narciso Yepes (1927 - 1997) discovered that with four extra strings tuned to C, Bb, Ab and Gb, all twelve notes of the chromatic scale could generate sympathetic resonances. So, even if you never play these extra strings, they are still making a contribution to the overall sonority of the guitar.

The lowest three strings are tuned up an octave, making the C the lowest note. The Bb is the exact same pitch as the 5th string 1st fret, the Ab is the exact same pitch as the 6th string 4th fret, and the Gb is the exact same pitch as the 6th string 2nd fret. Sometimes the notes are of course notated as sharps: A#, G# and F#.

[1] 24 Pieces for Guitar, and Classical and Contemporary Studies for Bass Guitar, Mel Bay Publications.

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Right-Hand Technique

The technique of playing bass notes on multi-string guitars requires some discussion:

Descending adjacent bass strings: always use rest strokes with the right-hand thumb when moving from the 6th string to the 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th. This will stop the previously-played note from ringing on. If you do not use rest strokes, the sustain from all the clashing of adjacent notes will confuse the harmony.

Ascending adjacent bass strings: As you go from, say, the 10th string to the 9th, the 10th string will keep ringing, unless you stop it. You can stop it after sounding the 9th string - just hop back with your thumb, placing it on the 10th string. Or - and this is often preferable - play the 10th string with a rest stroke (as usual) then just before you play the 9th string lean back into the 10th string, touching it with the side of your thumb while stopping it ringing, then play the 9th string with a rest stroke.

Gapped movement in the bass: Sometimes the bass moves by leap, not to an adjacent string. This can be problematic in that you have to decide how to stop the note you are leaving, while trying to gauge the distance to the next note. I generally stop the first bass note just before leaping to the next. This allows some daylight to enter between the notes, but usually this is not a bad thing.

Do all bass notes need to be stopped? No, they don't. Sometimes a note will die before you need to stop it, and sometimes it doesn't sound so bad if you let it sustain. But allowing a bass note to sustain should be an interpretive choice; it should not be left ringing due to poor technique.

Besides the present book of repertoire pieces, Gilbert Isbin has also created a book of **12 Easy Studies For 10-string Guitar (Yepes Tuning)**.These studies will teach you how to control the resonance of your guitar, if you make a conscious decision about how to articulate each bass note.

The Music

Isbin’s music is always lyrical, even when, at times, the language is harmonically and rhythmically advanced. If I am in a position to offer any advice in playing these works, it is to seek out the melody, and learn to sing it if possible, for therein lies the key to understanding Isbin’s sonic poetry.

Rob MacKillop
Edinburgh
2018

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GILBERT ISBIN

Belgian composer Gilbert Isbin's compositional and performing style defies genre, blending elements for contemporary classical, jazz, early music, world music and improvisation.

He has been compared favorably to the likes of Ralph Towner and Egberto Gismonti, his music described as 'oblique, subtle, and hauntingly beautiful'.

Isbin has performed in concert on festivals and major venues throughout Europe and the US.

As a leader and co-leader, he has released an impressive string of recordings for various labels with international acclaimed artists as Cameron Brown, Joe Fonda, Bruce Arnold, Jeff Gauthier, Scott Walton, Sandro di Stefano,…

His compositions for guitar(s), lute(s) and ensemble are published by Mel Bay, Berben Edizioni Musicali, The Uk Lute Society, Lantro Music, Golden River Music, Auurk Ed, Amazon.com…

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Listen and watch Rob MacKillop performing some of these compositions on https://rmclassicalguitar.com/10-string-guitar/ or listen to audio on https://gilbertisbin.com/compositions/guitar/

Fingerings are optional

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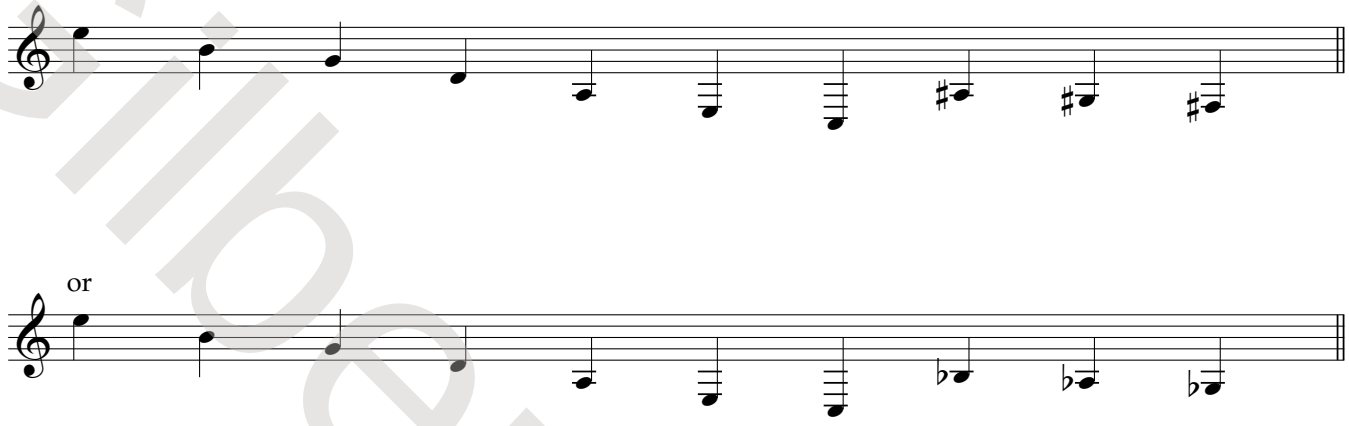
NARCISO YEPES TUNING



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OBSERVATION

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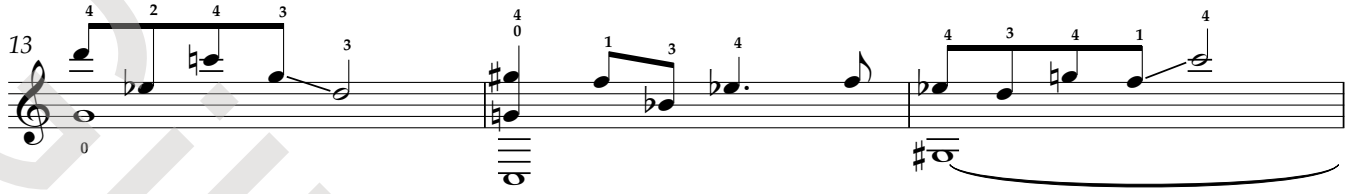

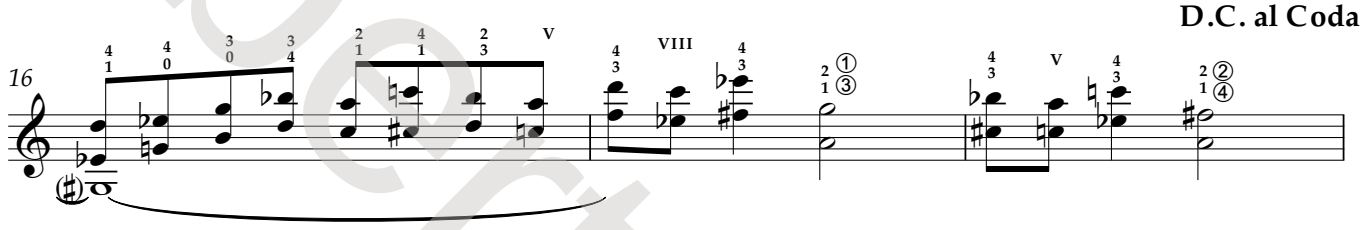

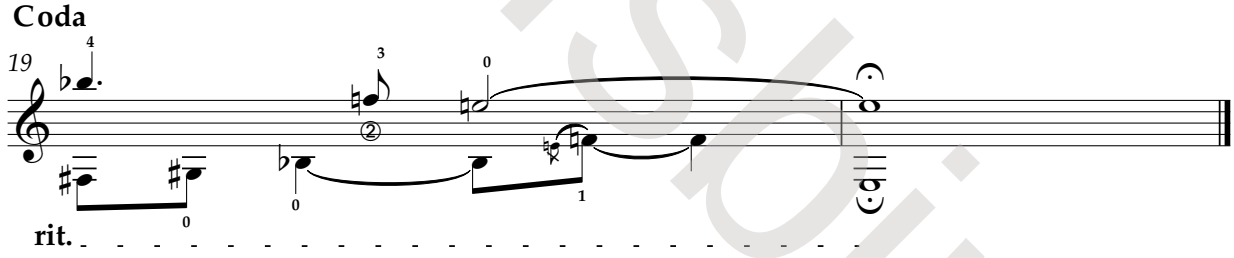

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TOMBEAU FOR NARCISO YEPES

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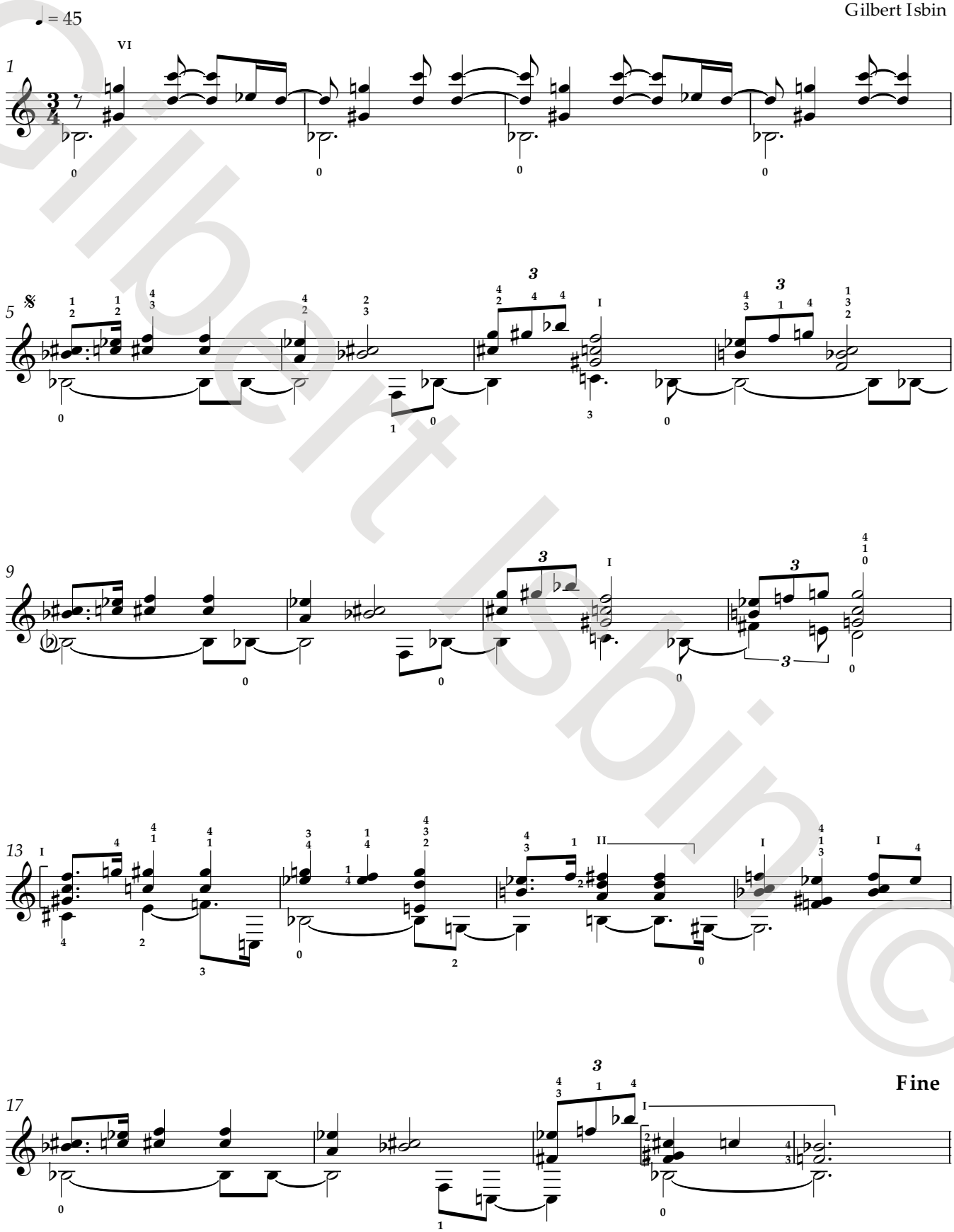

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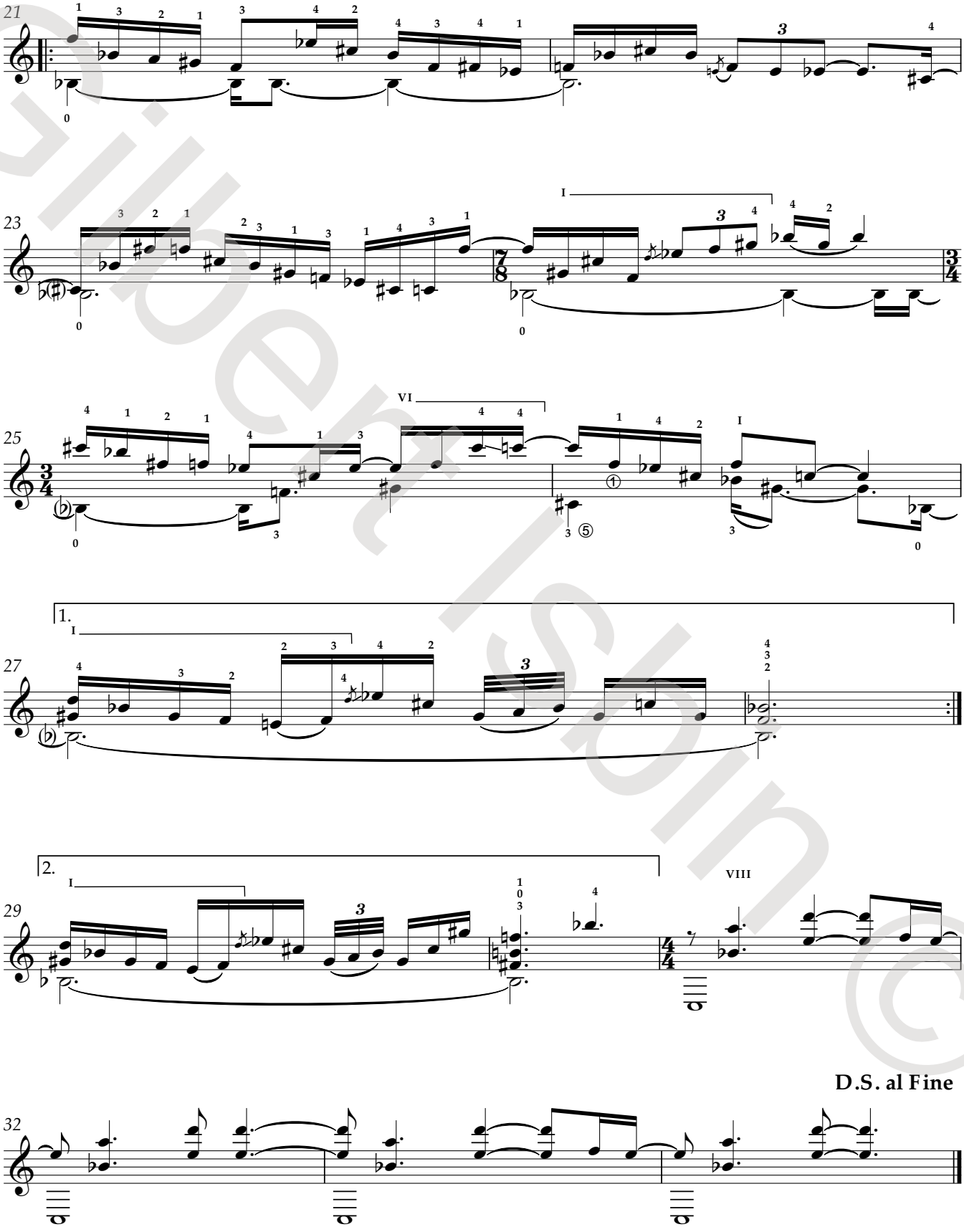

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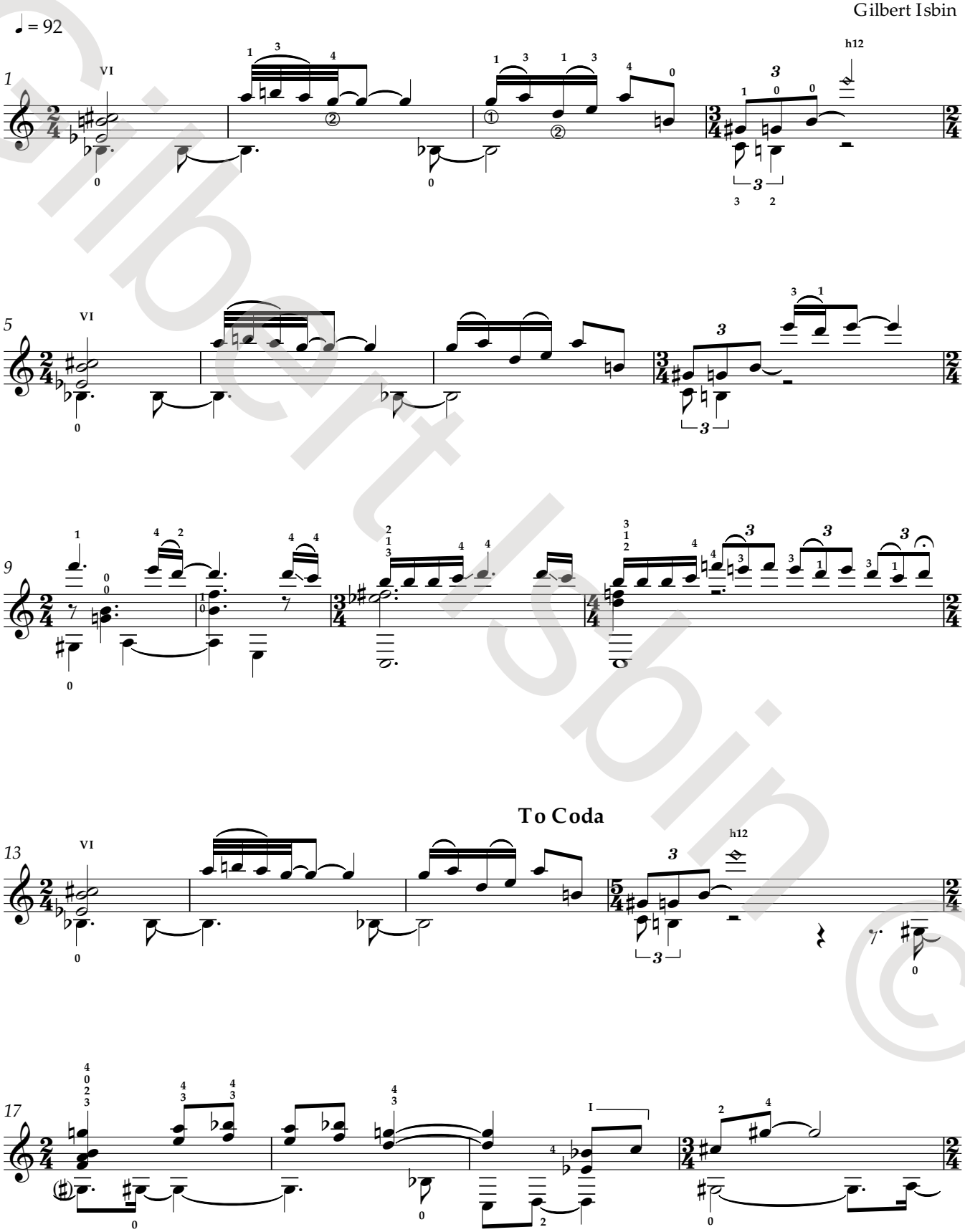

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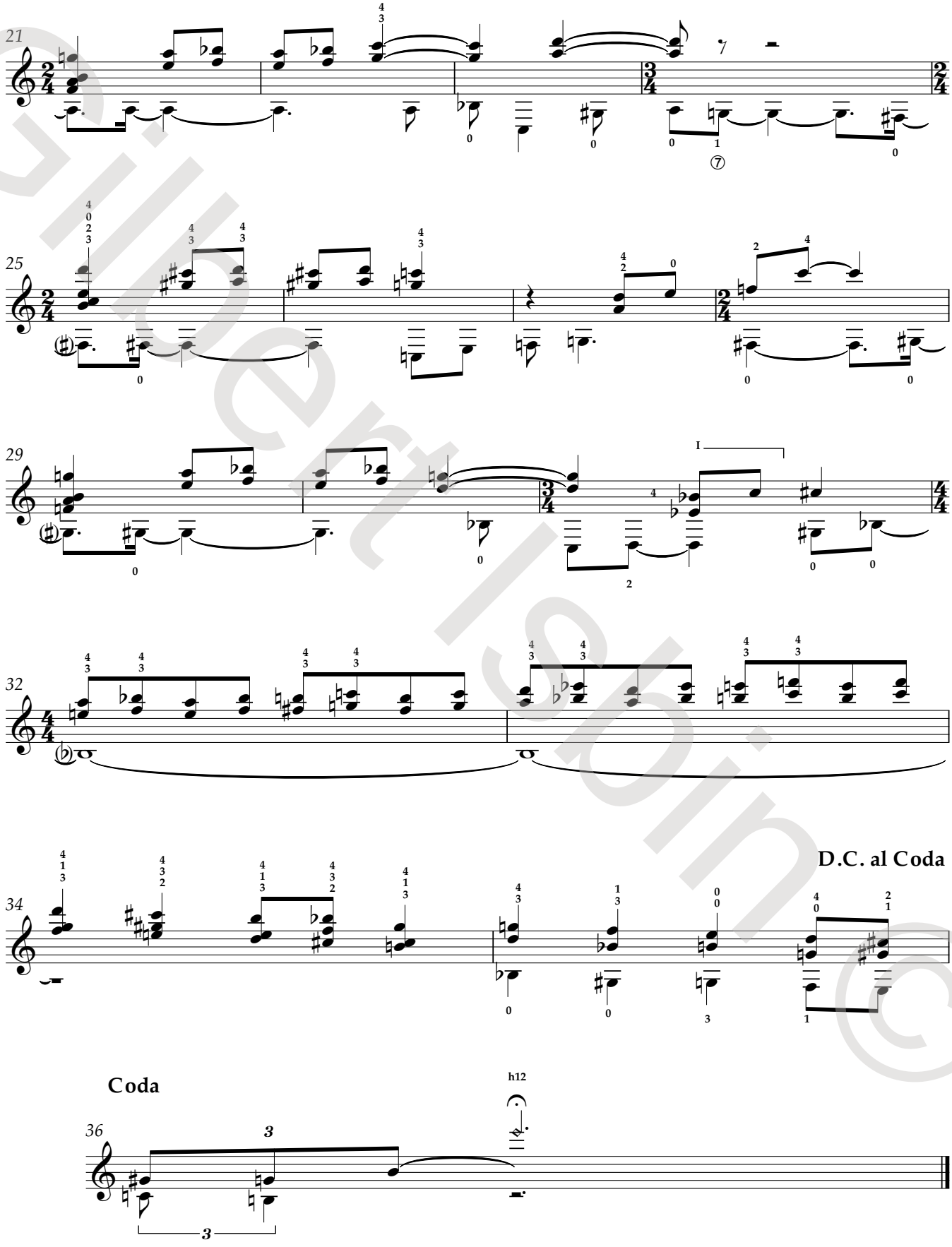

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LAMENT

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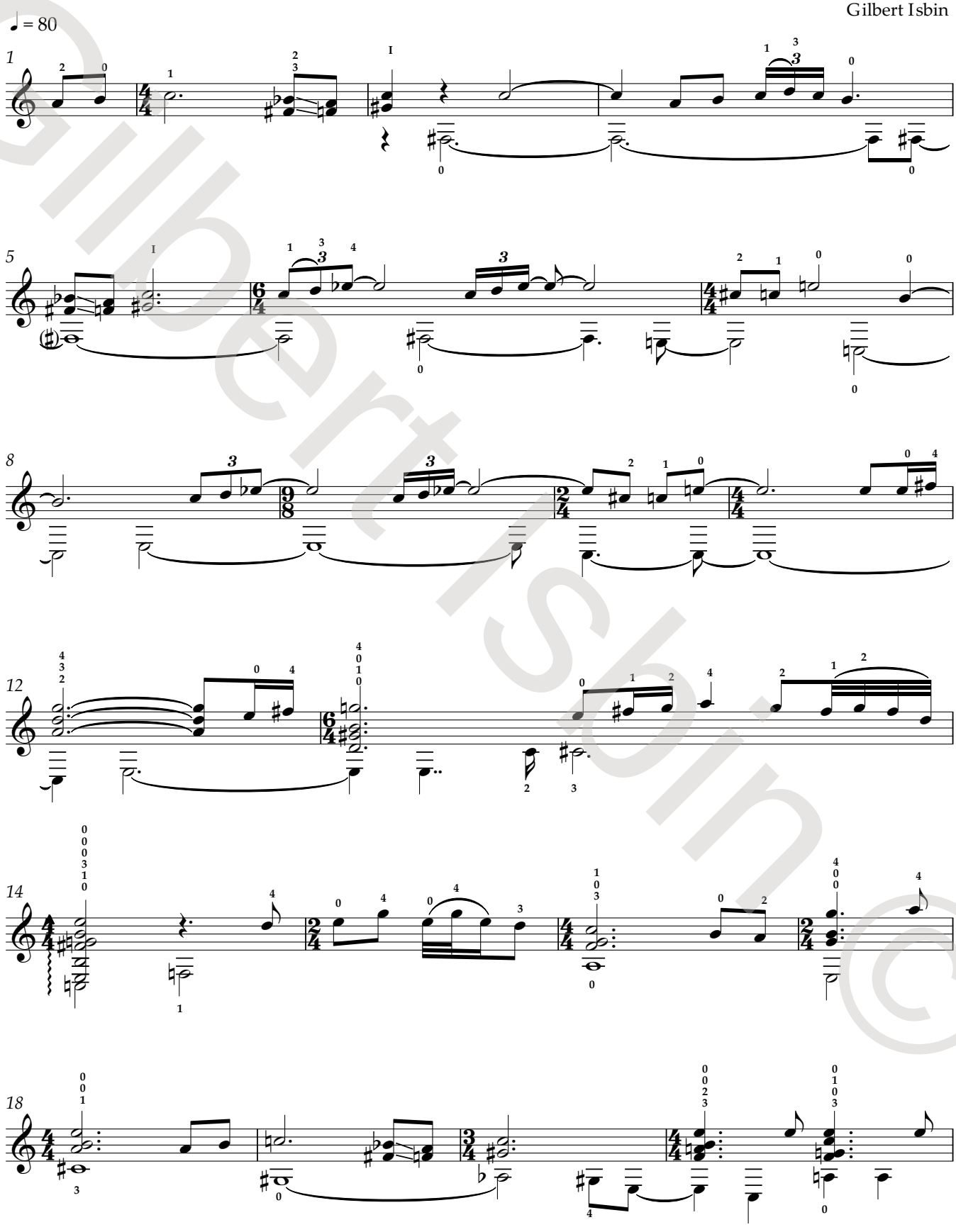

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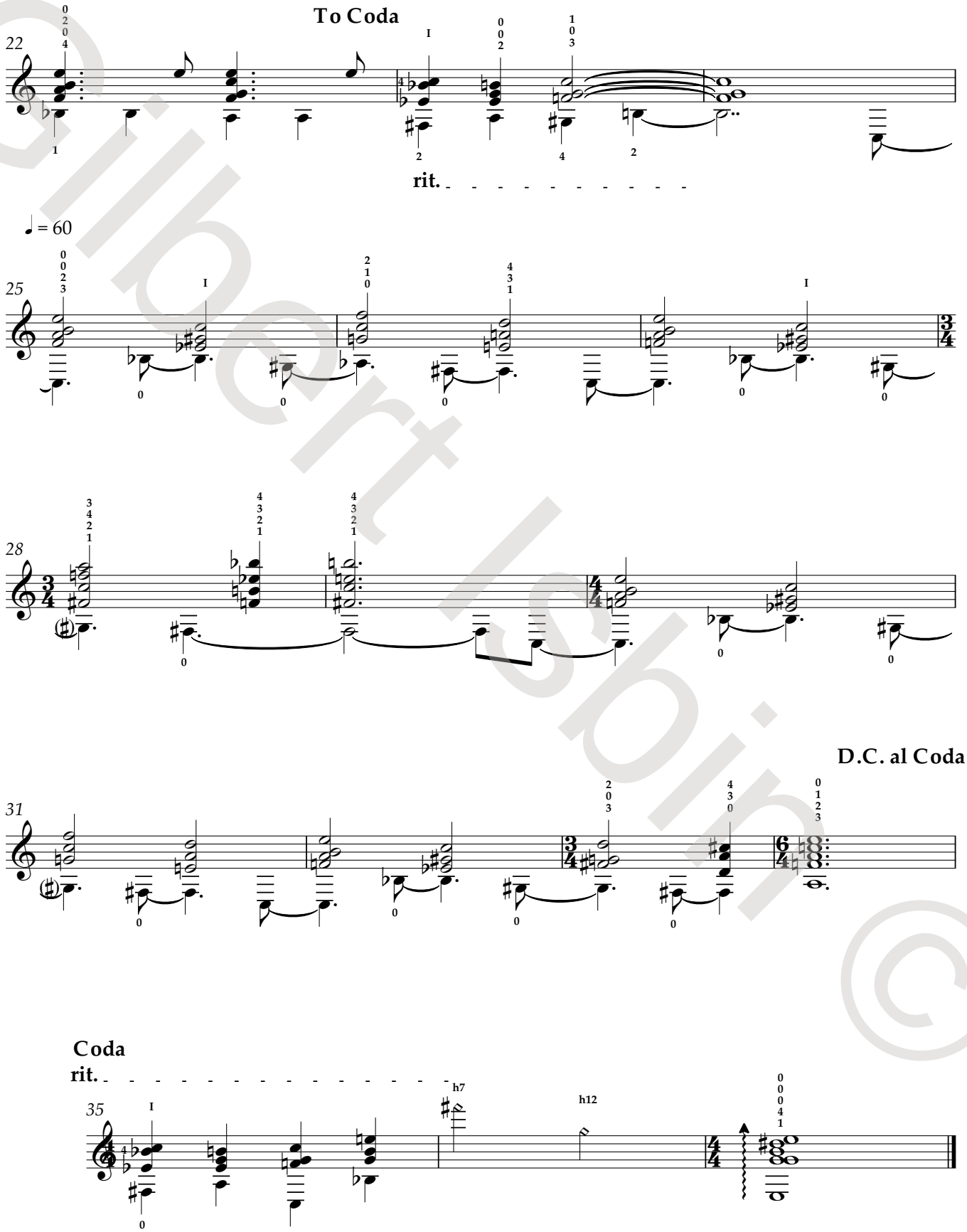

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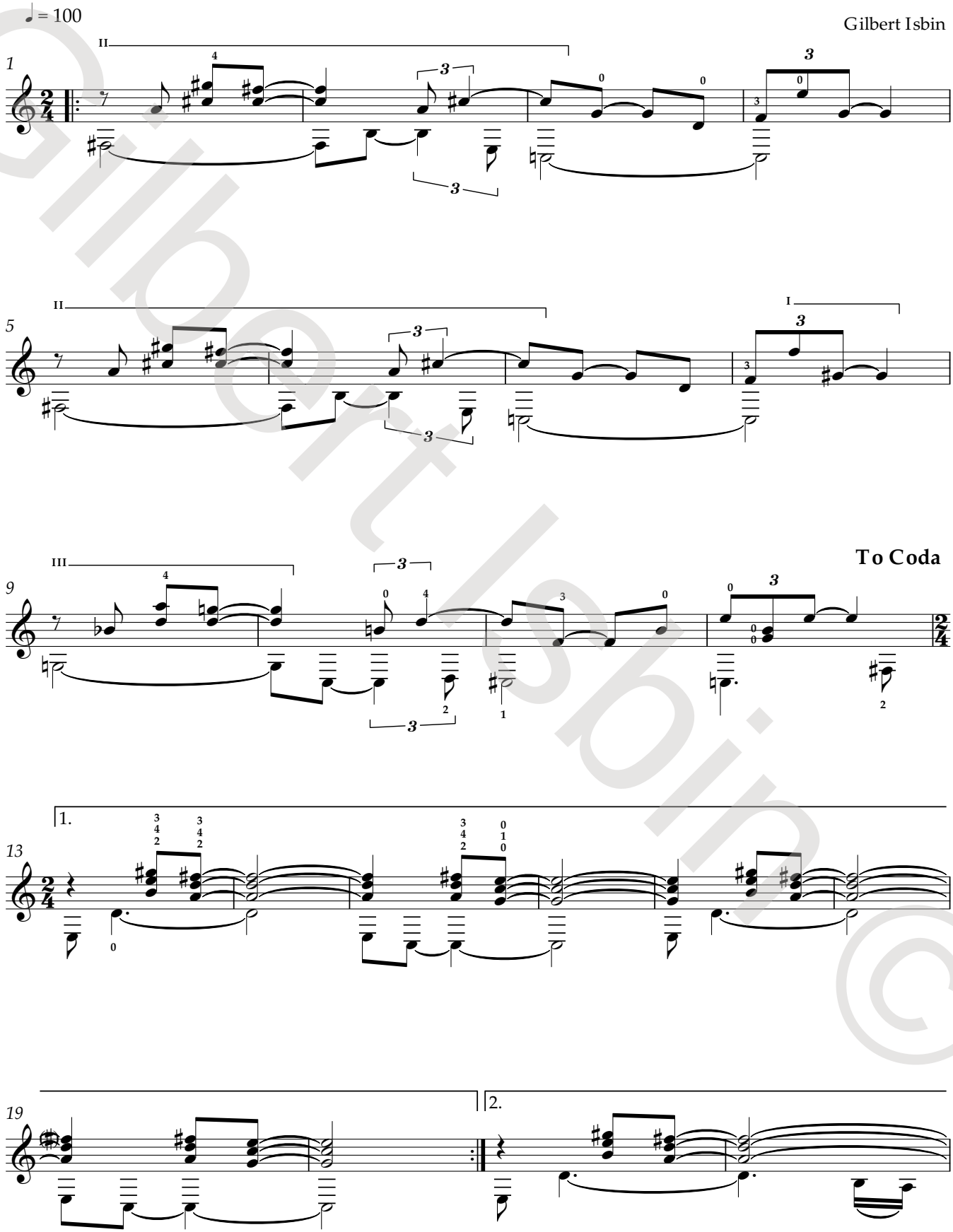

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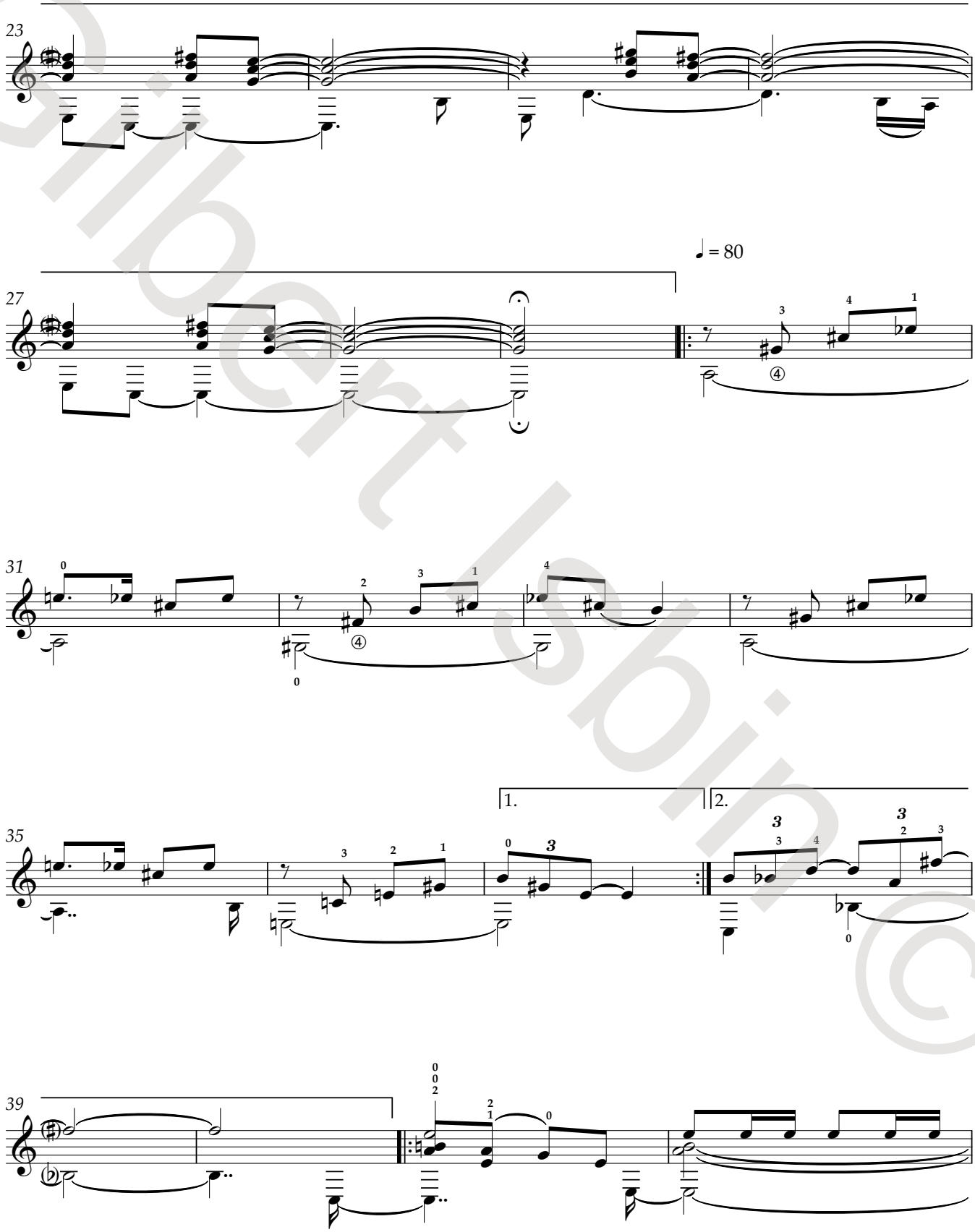

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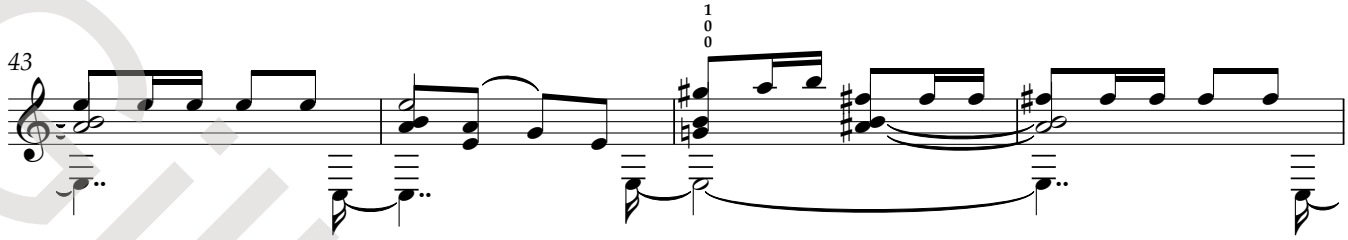

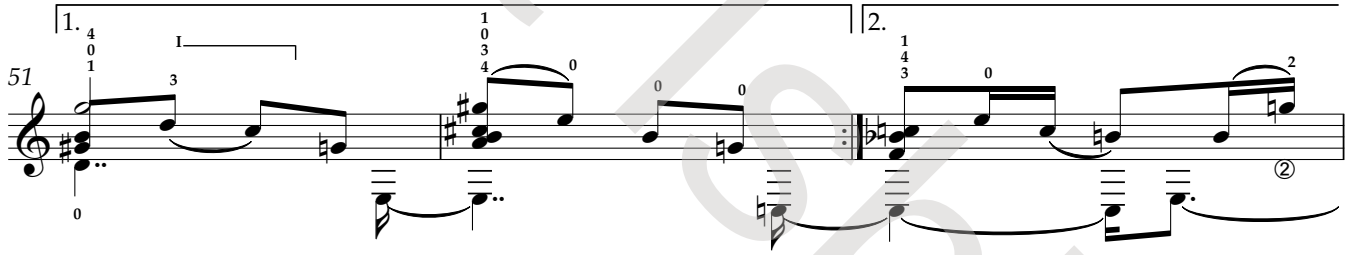

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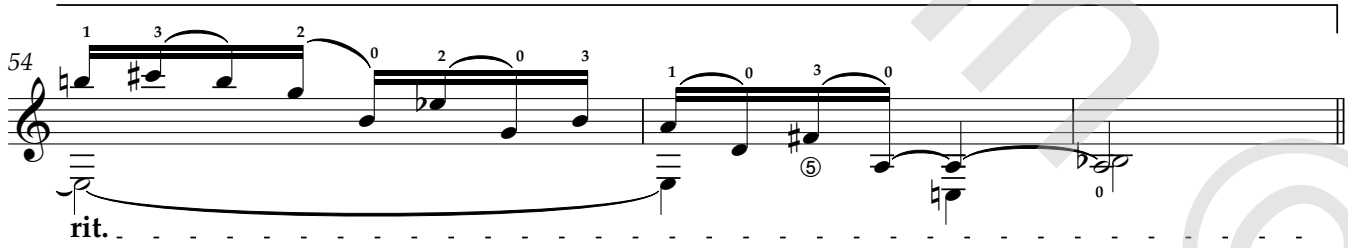

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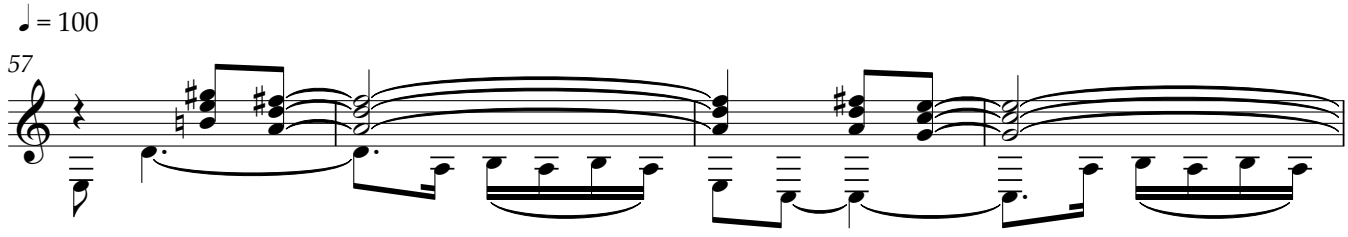

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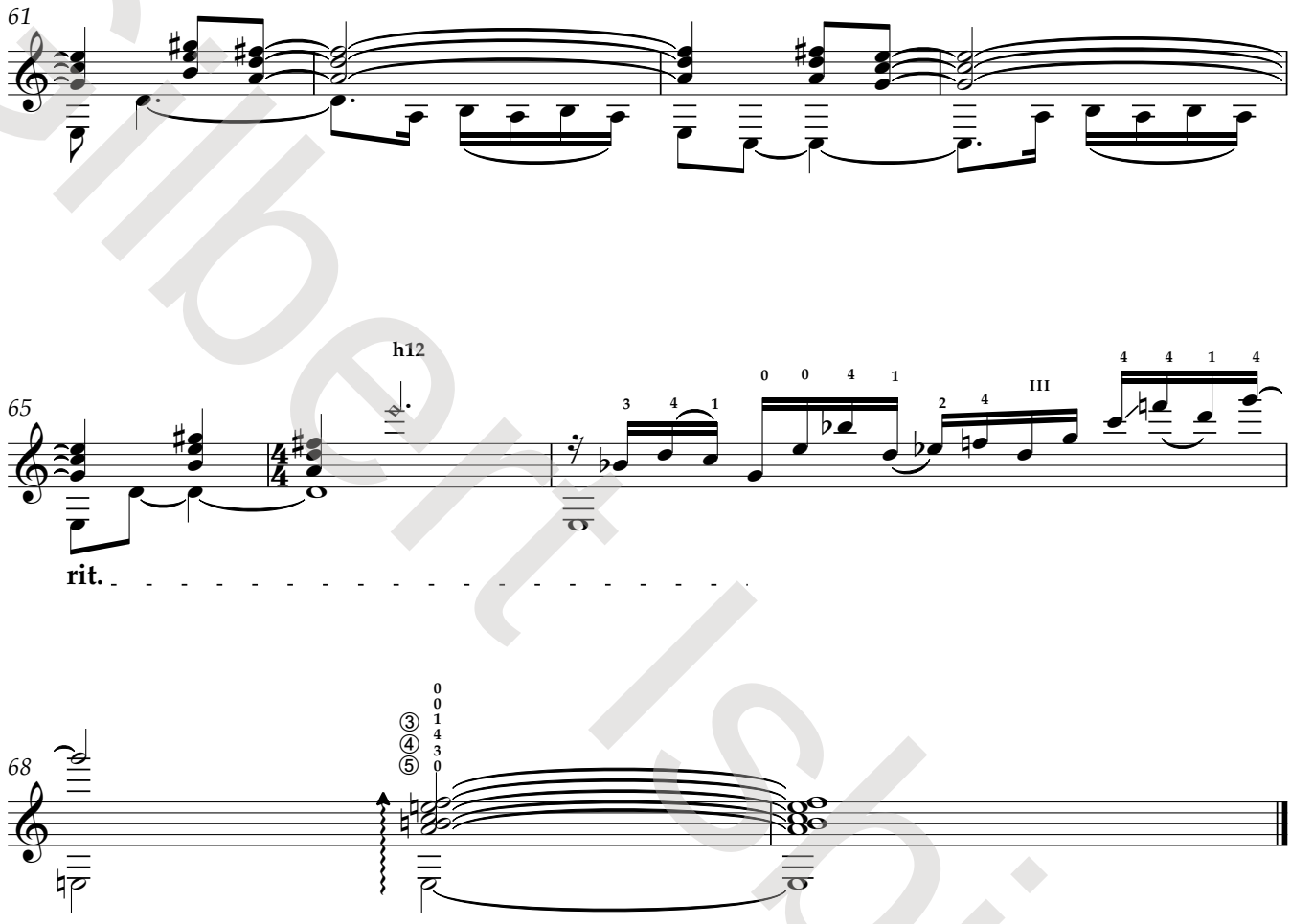

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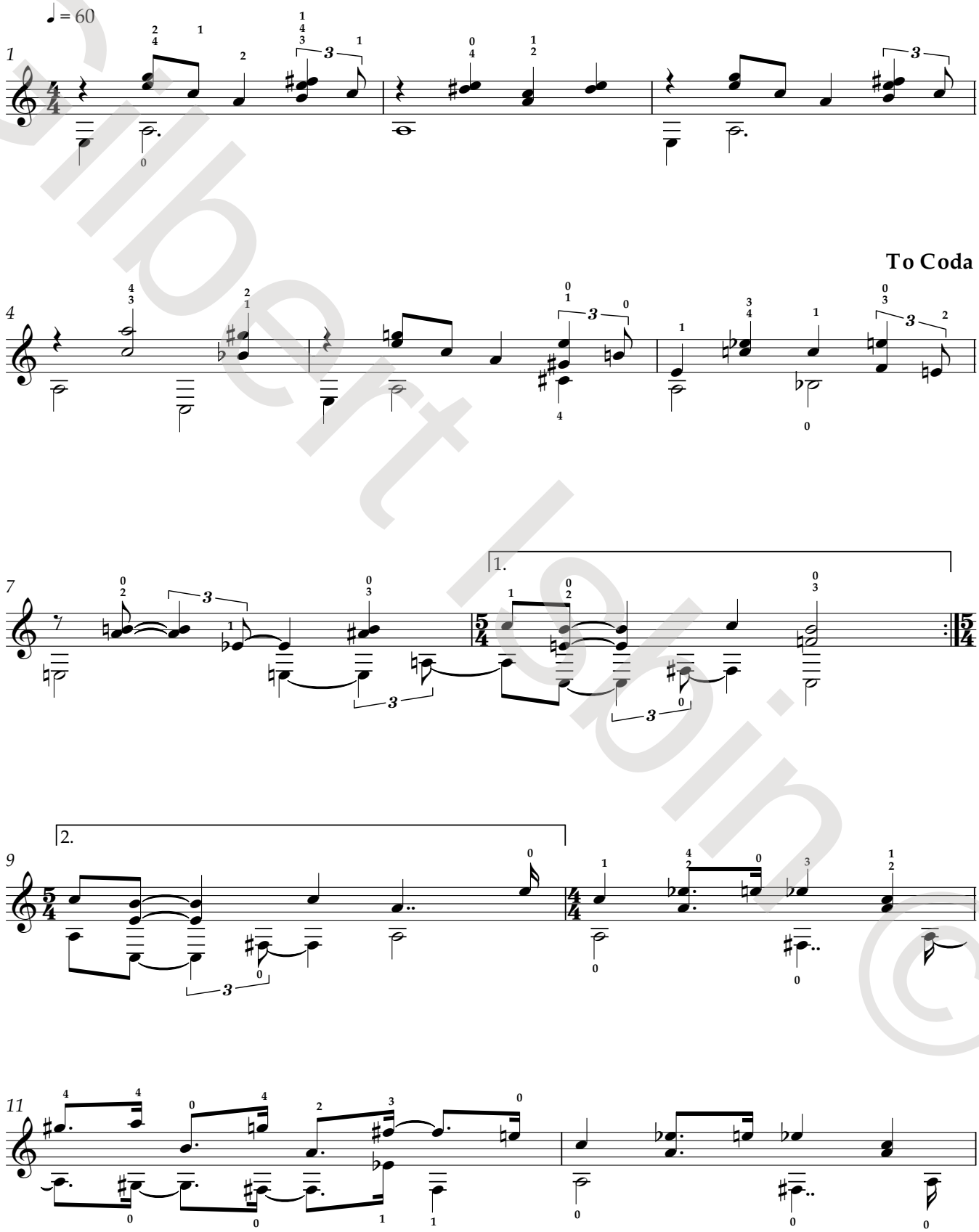

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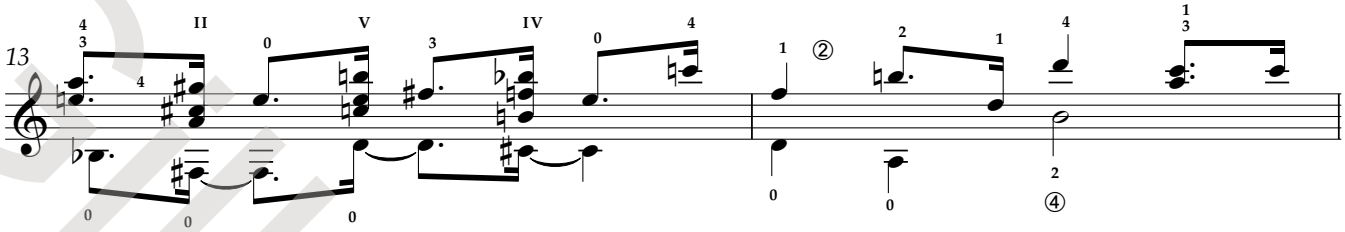

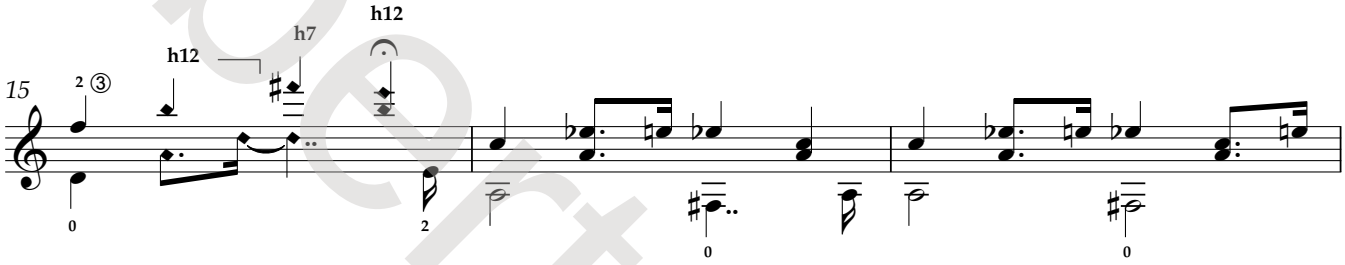

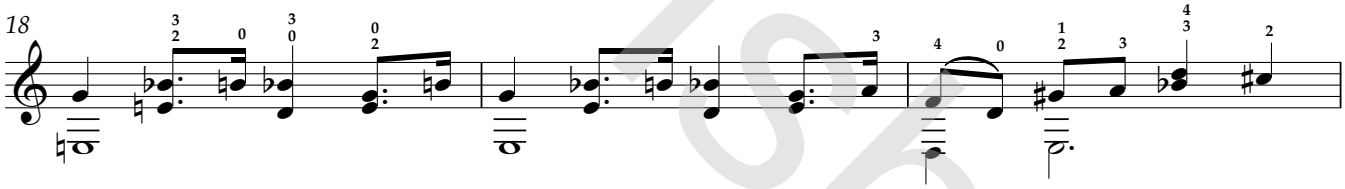

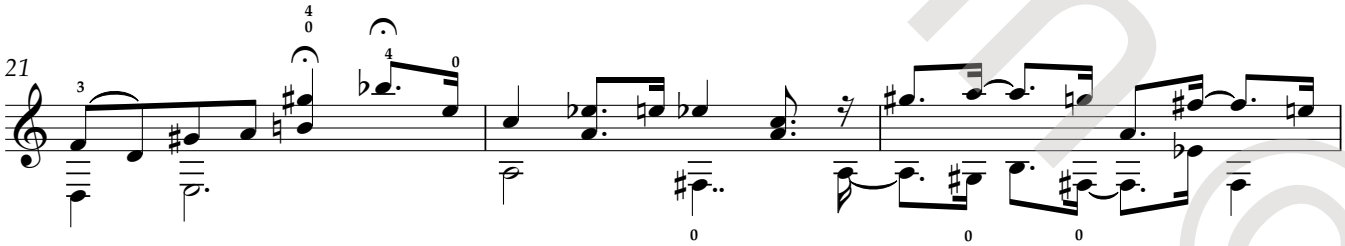

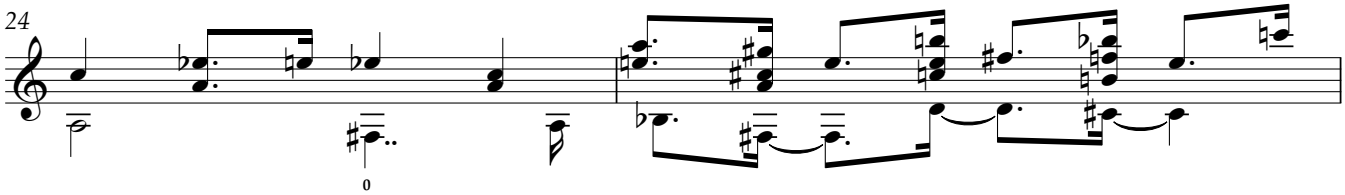

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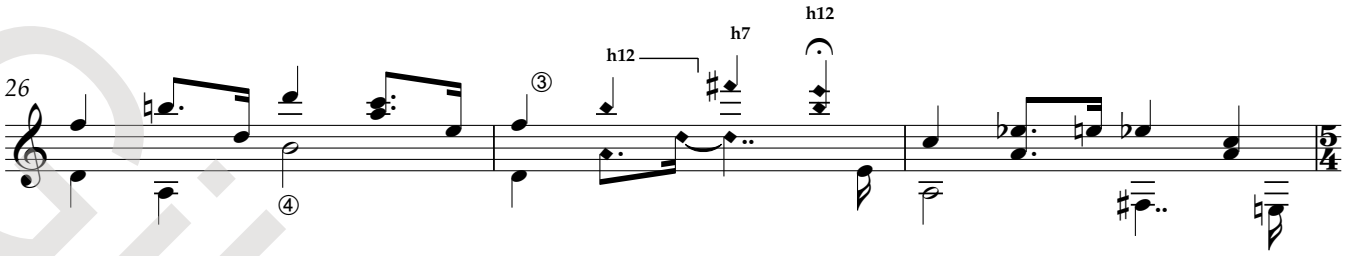

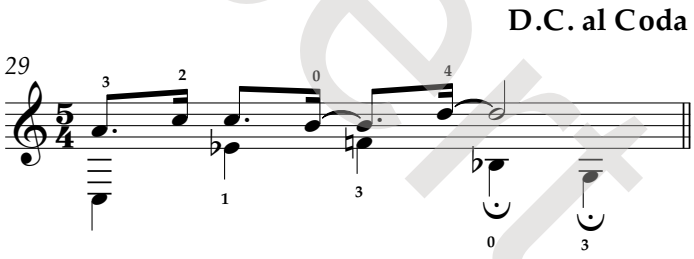

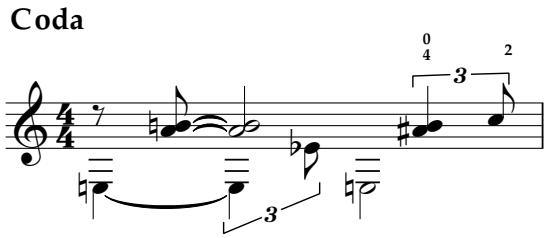

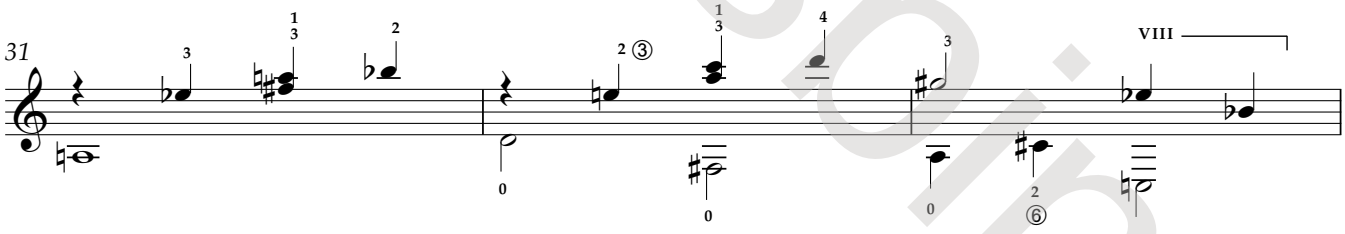

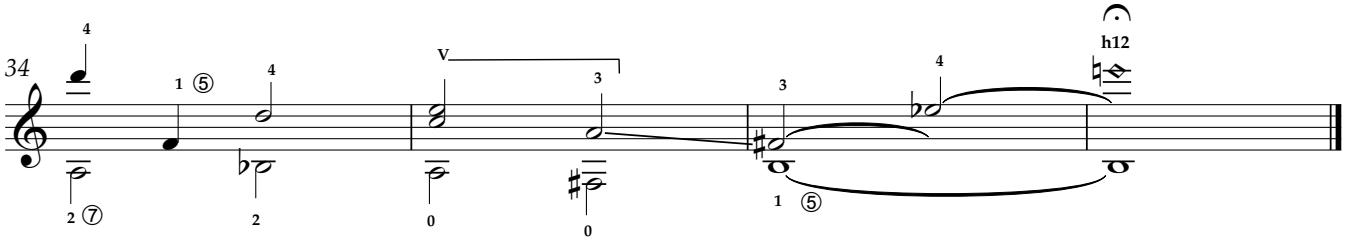

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WHERE ARE YOU NOW ?

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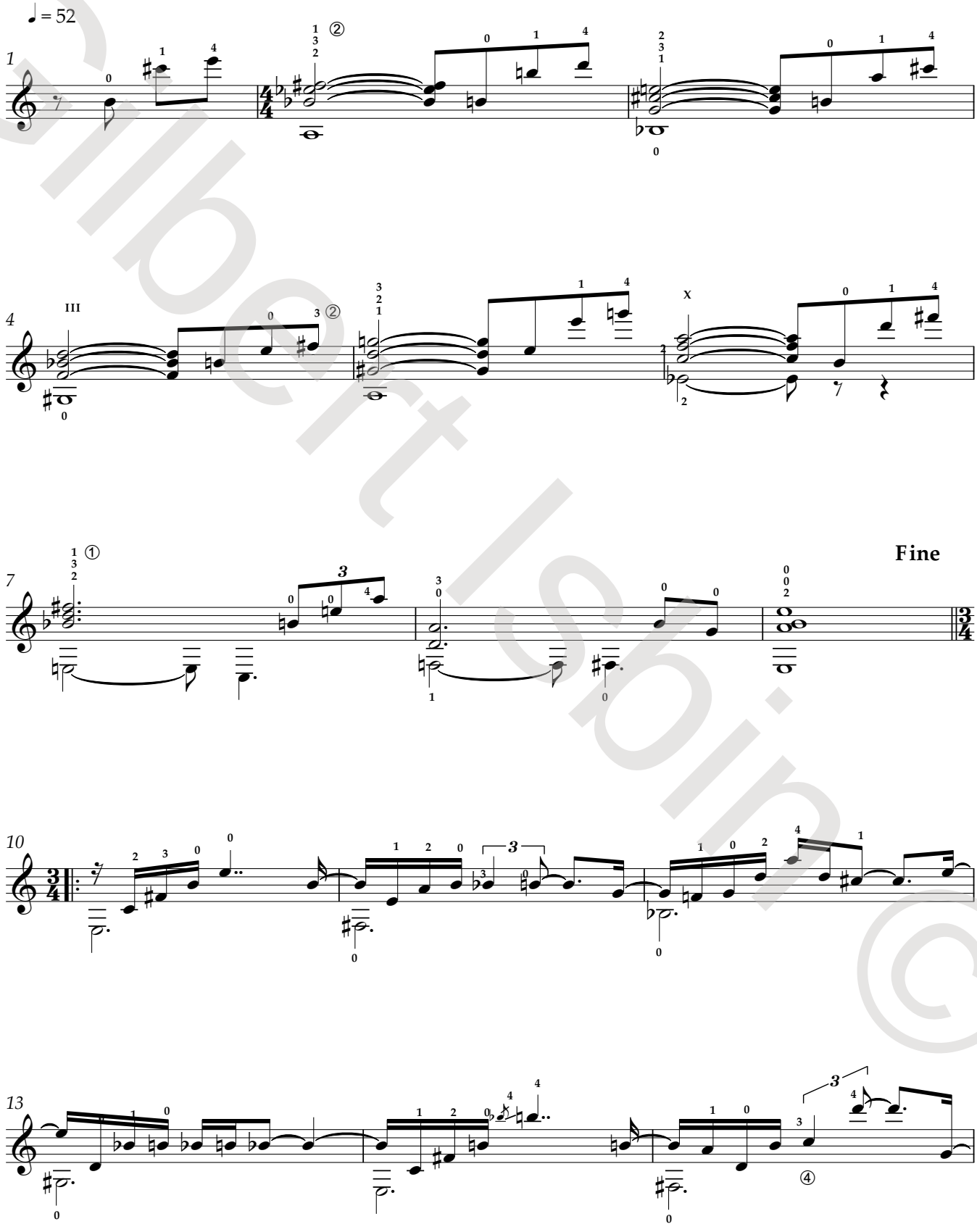

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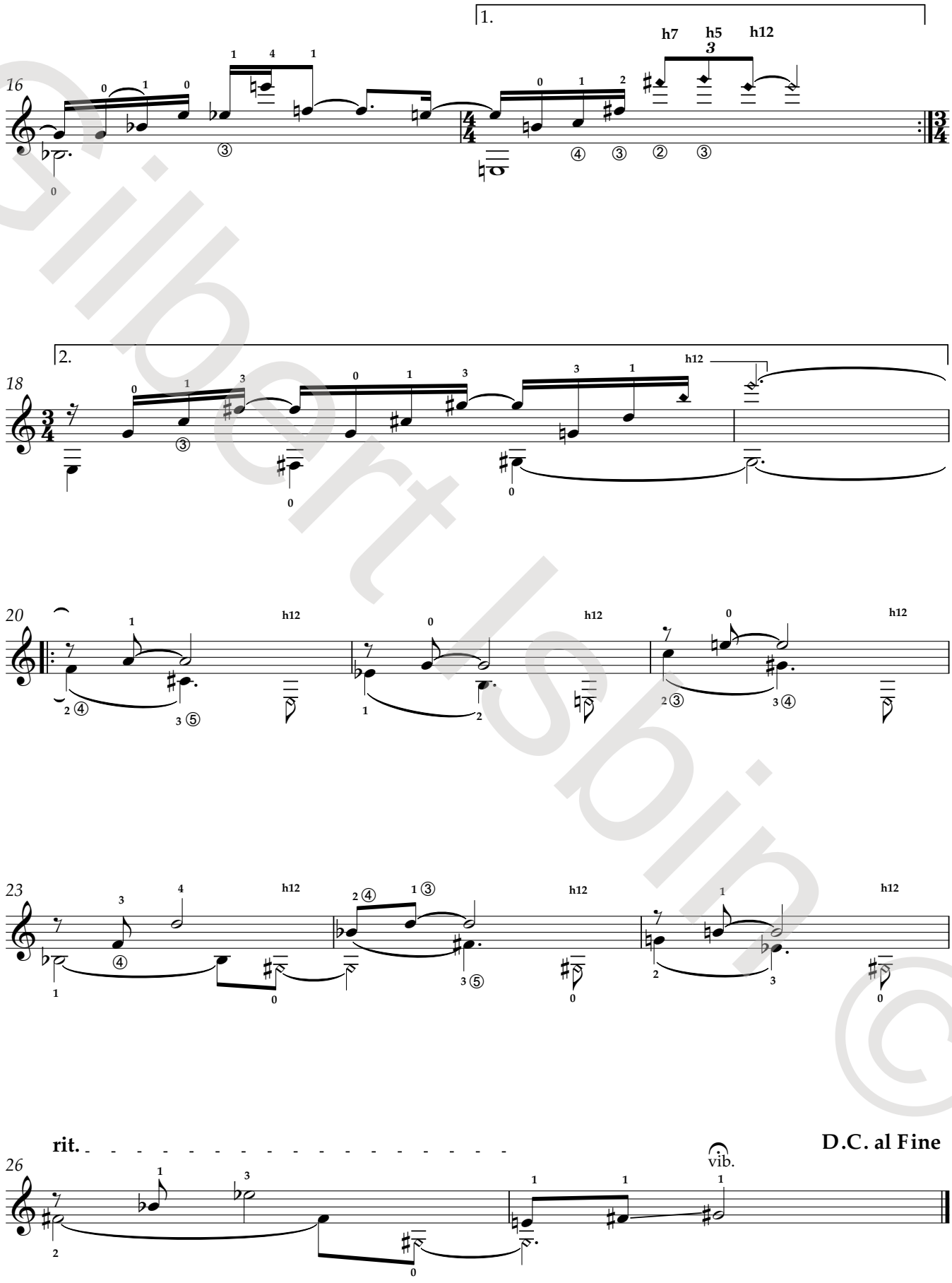

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CLOSE

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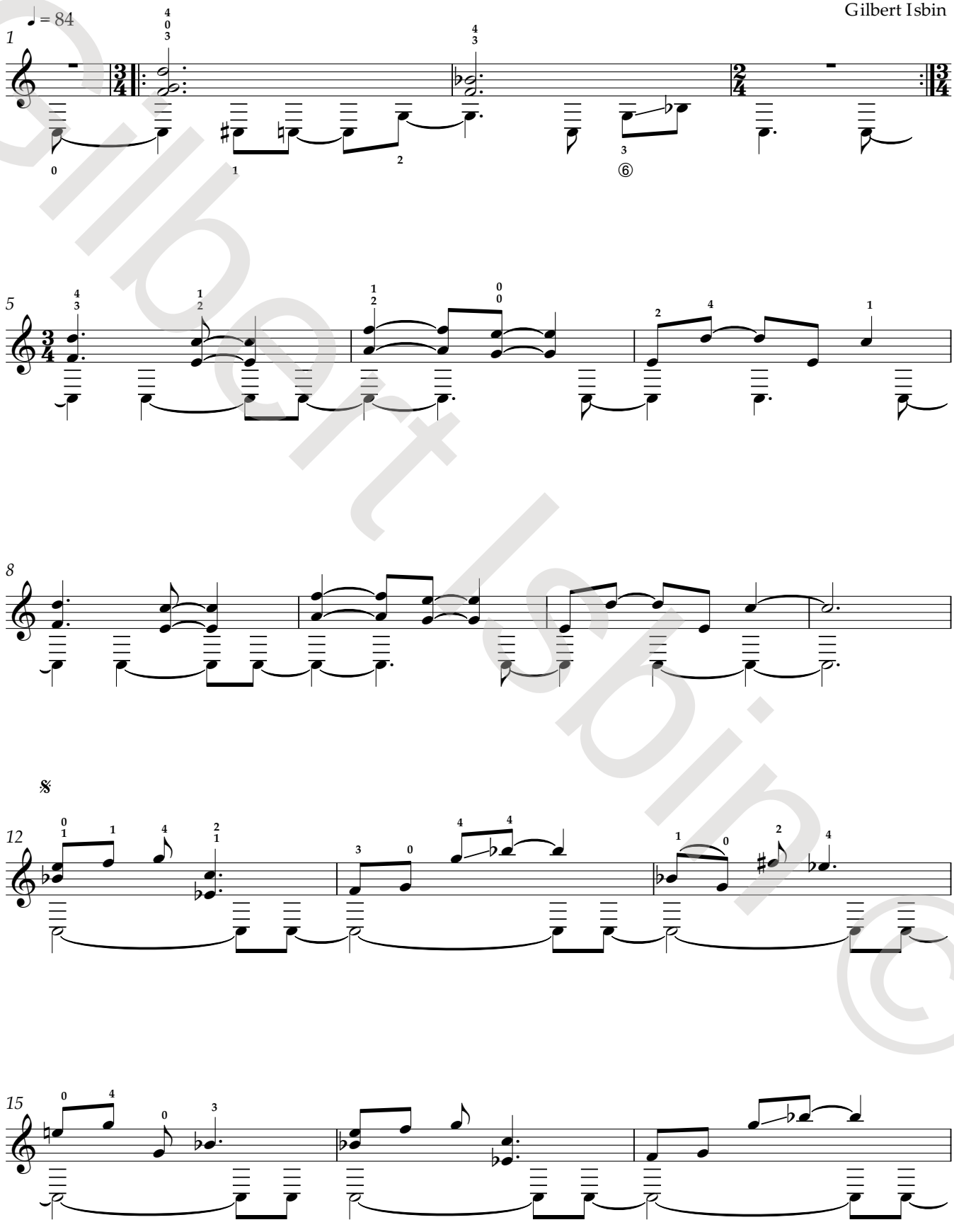

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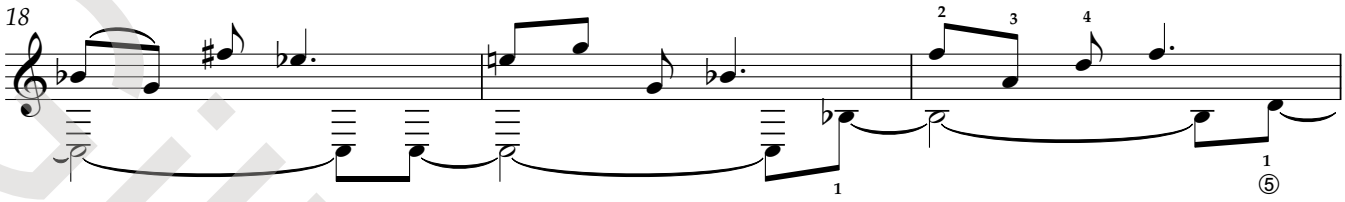

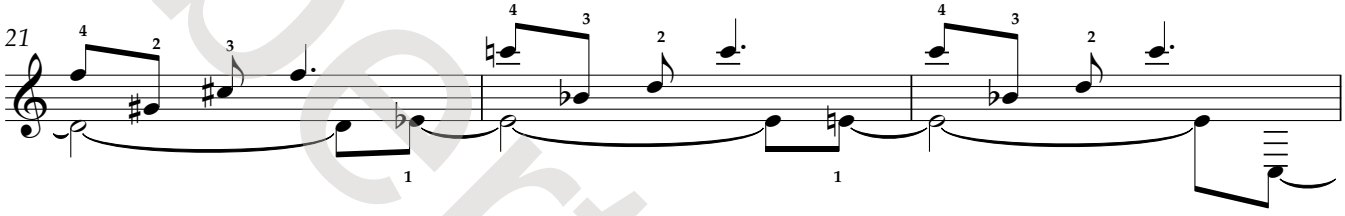

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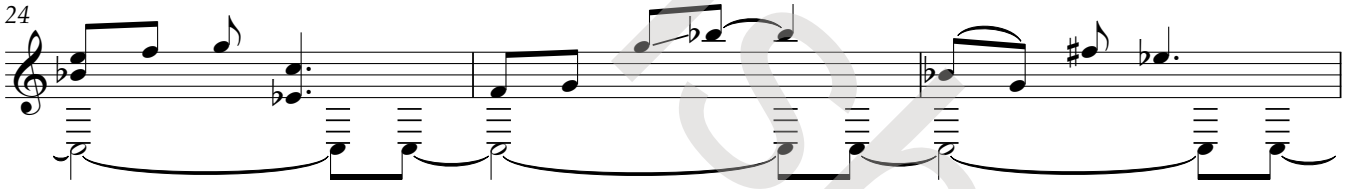

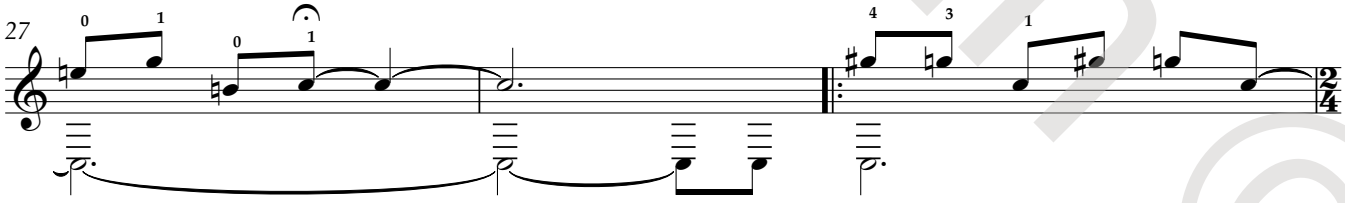

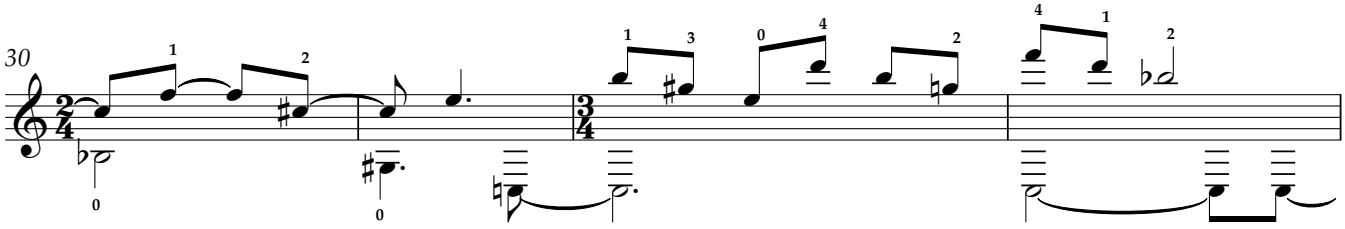

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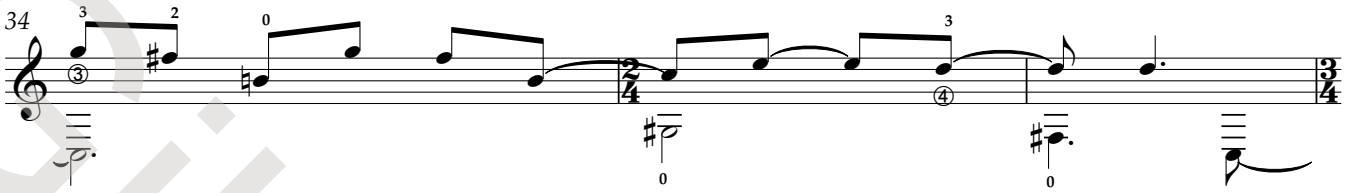

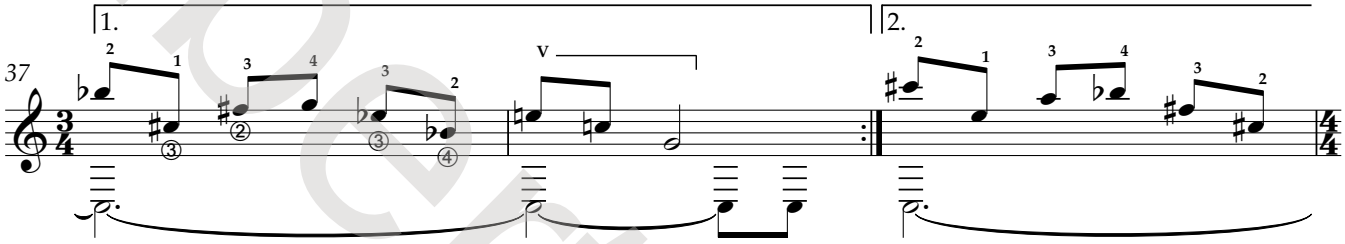

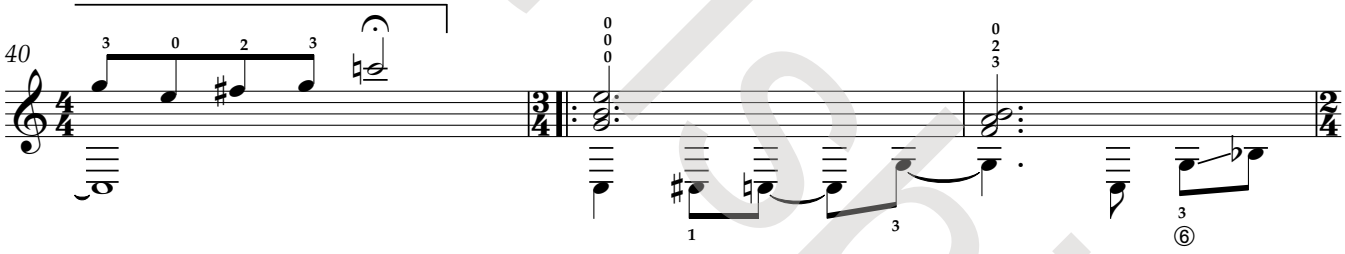

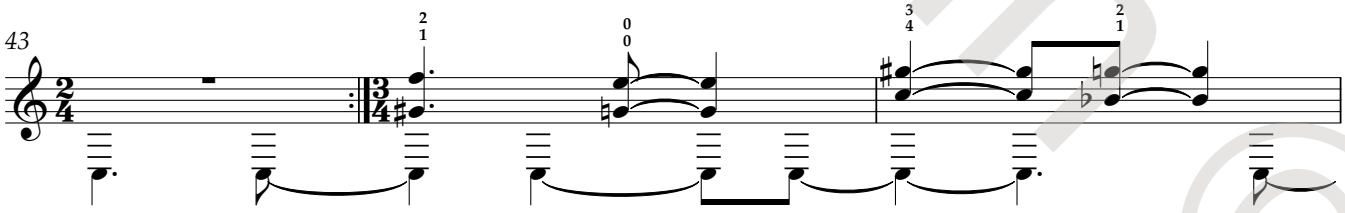

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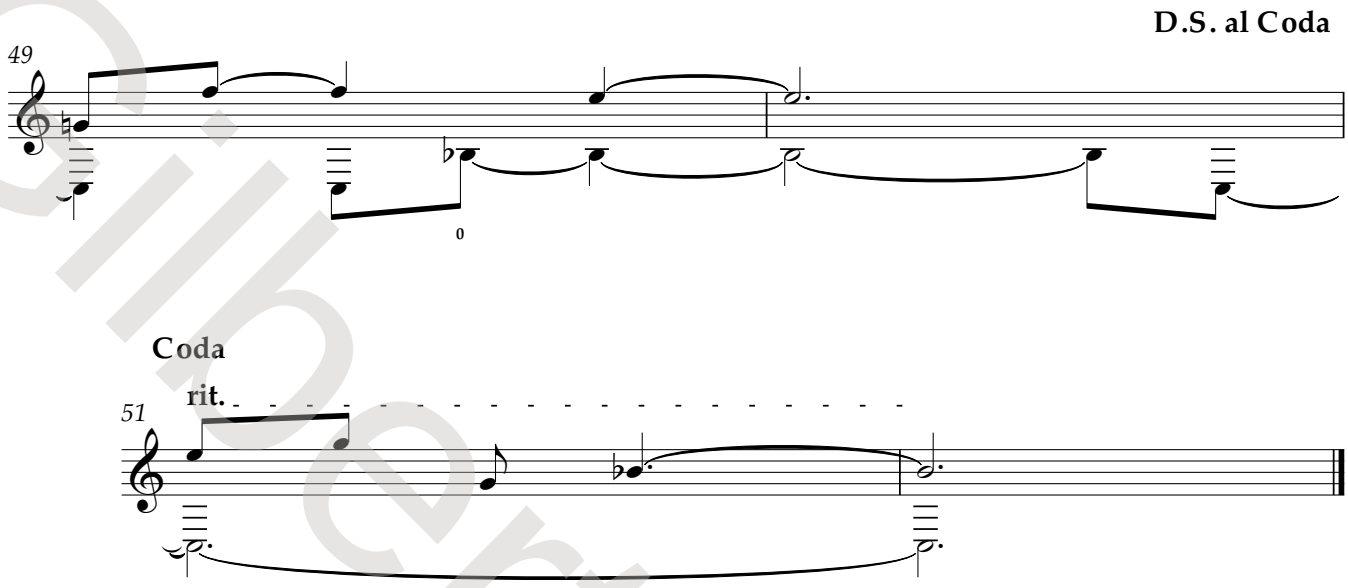

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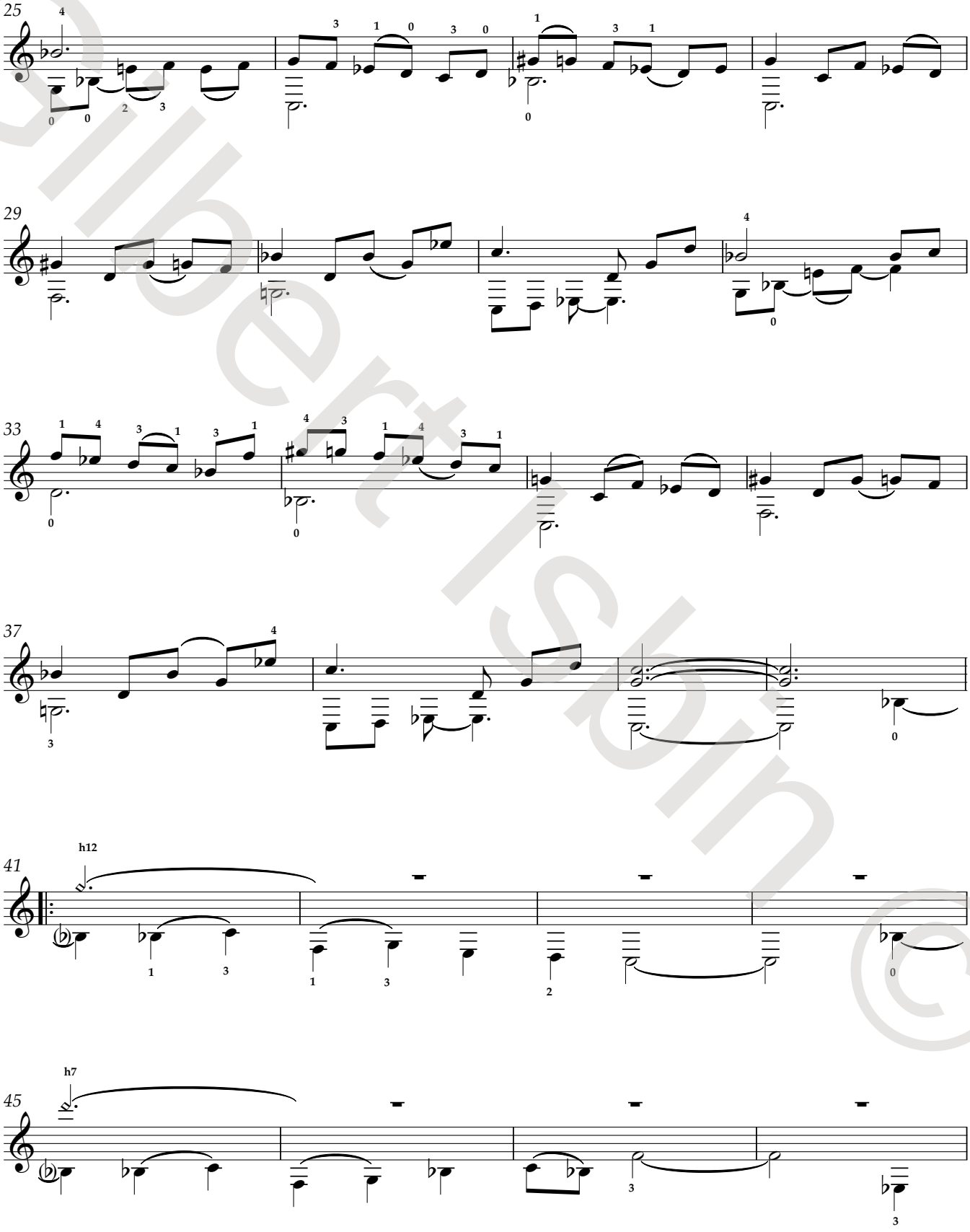

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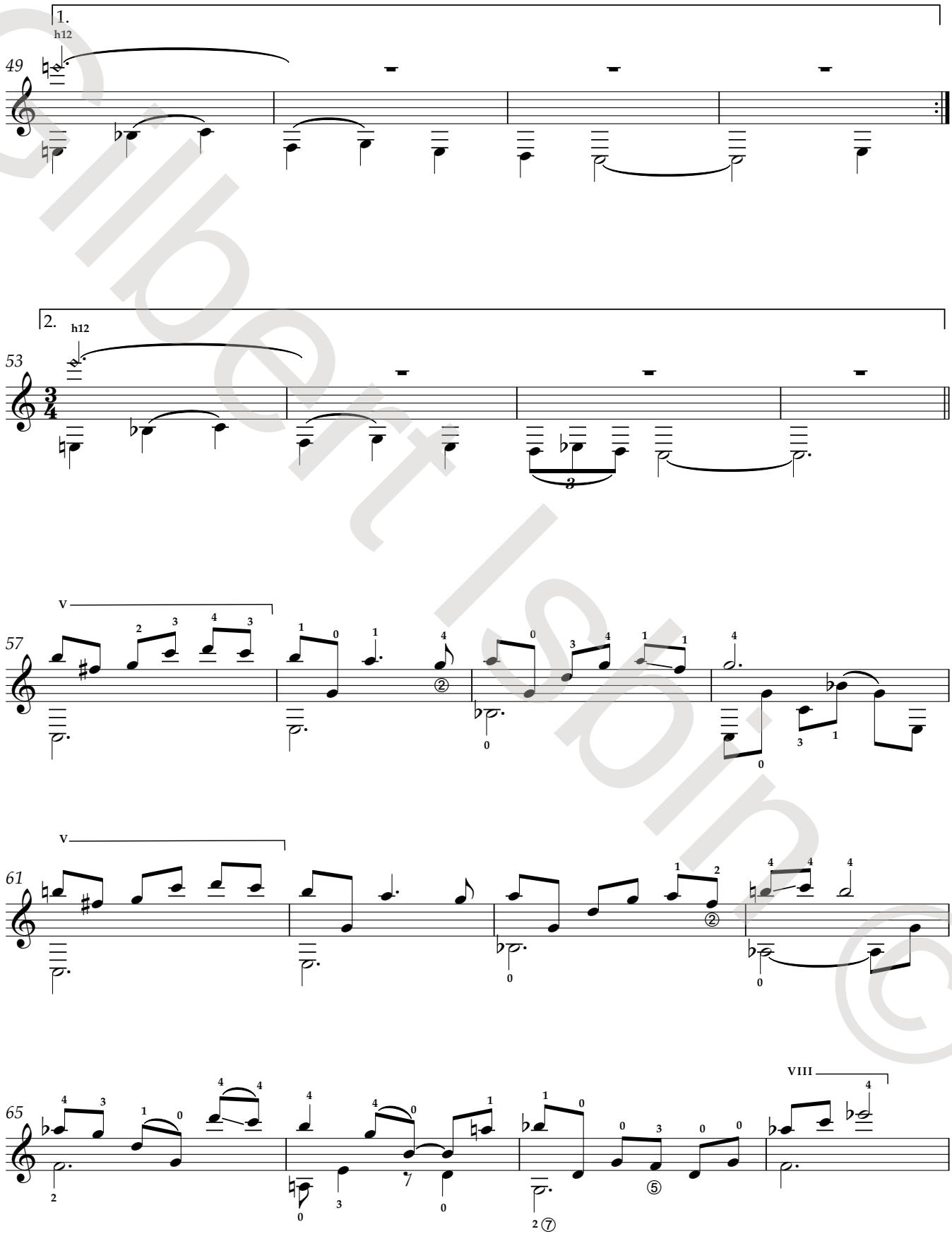

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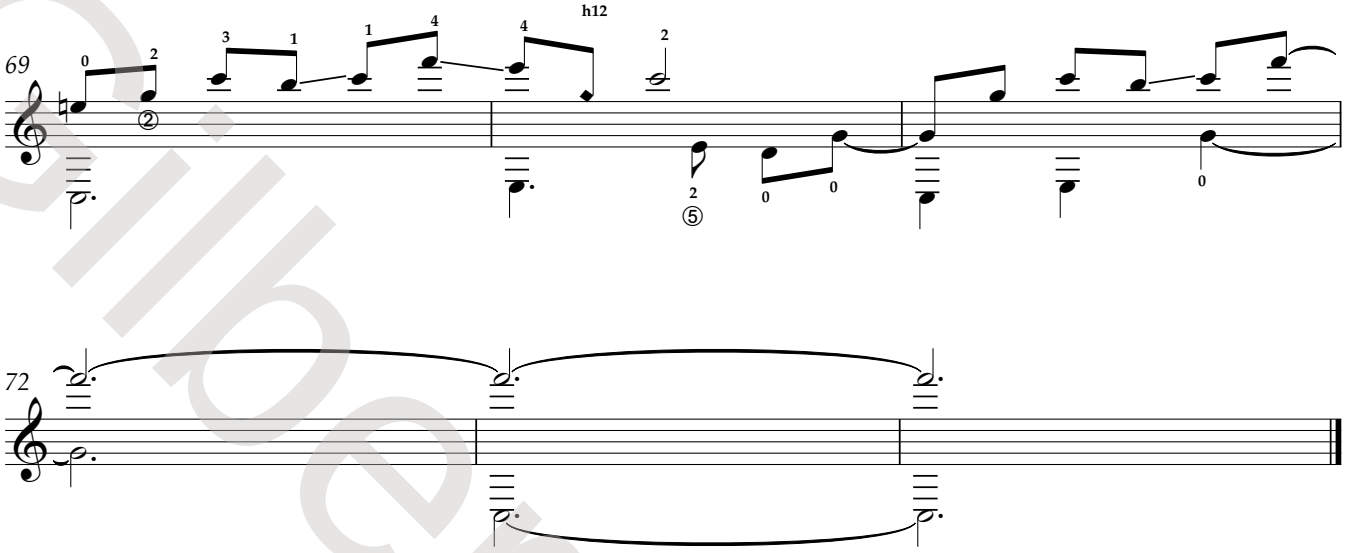

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HERE OR THERE

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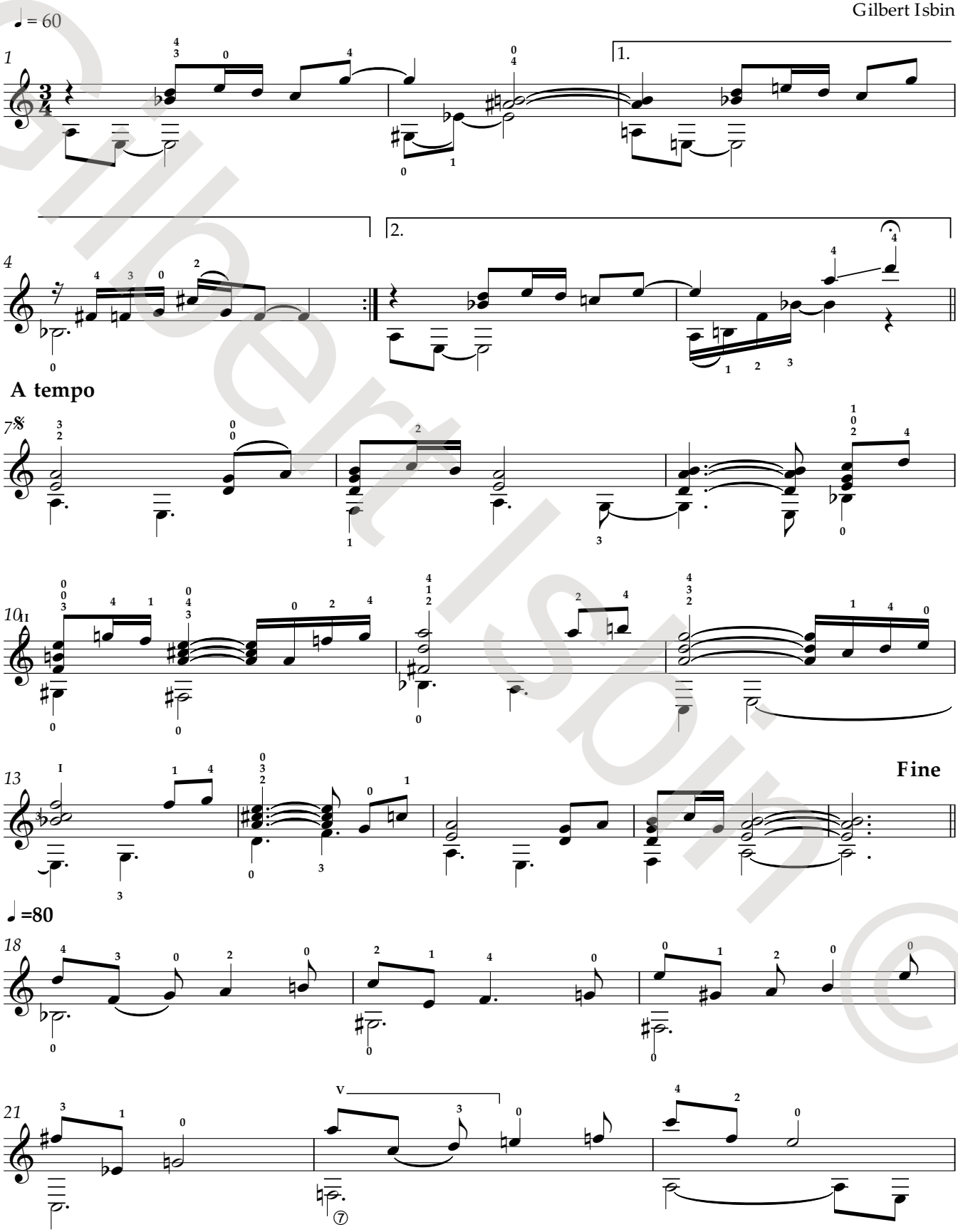

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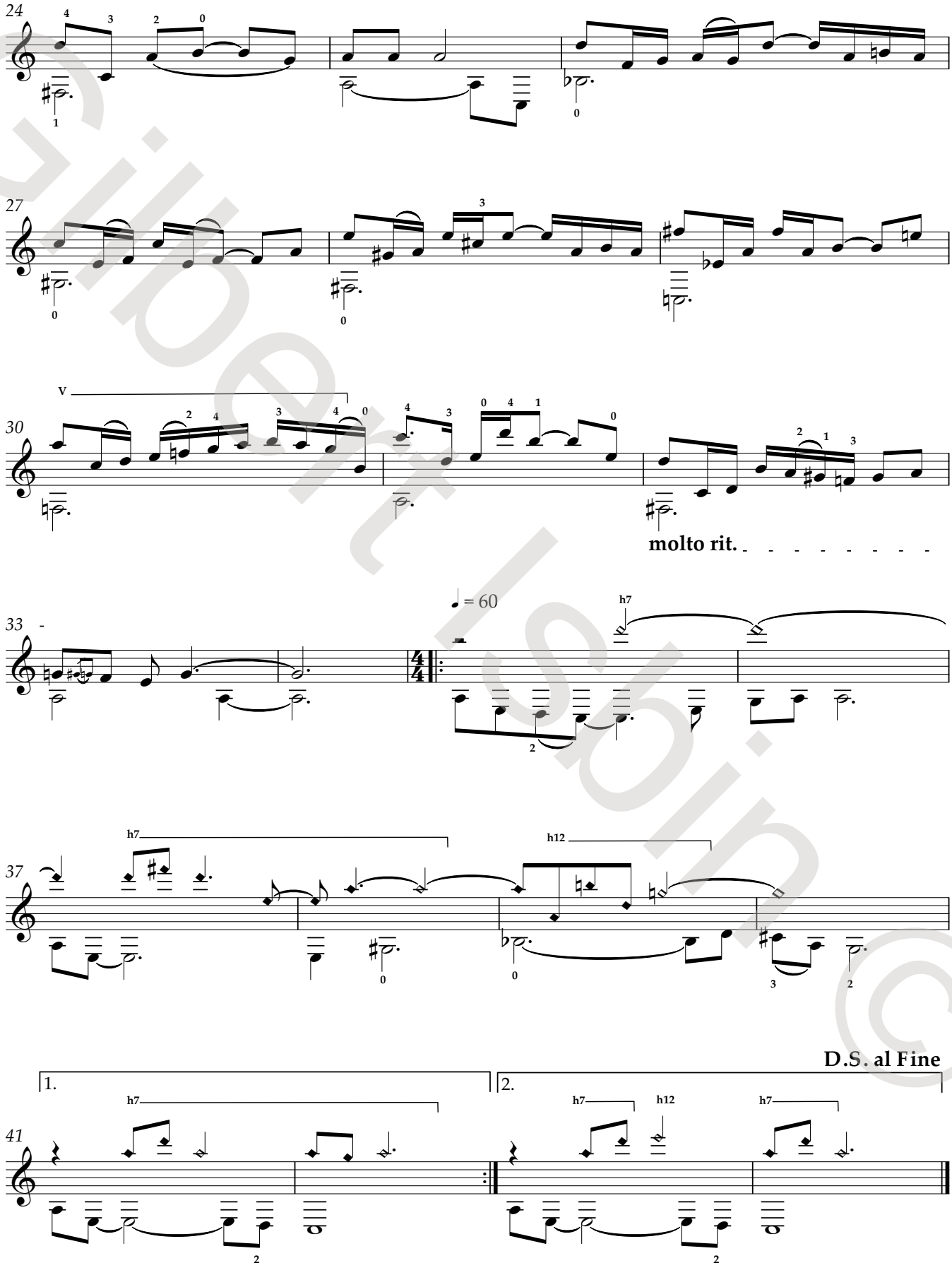

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FASCINATION

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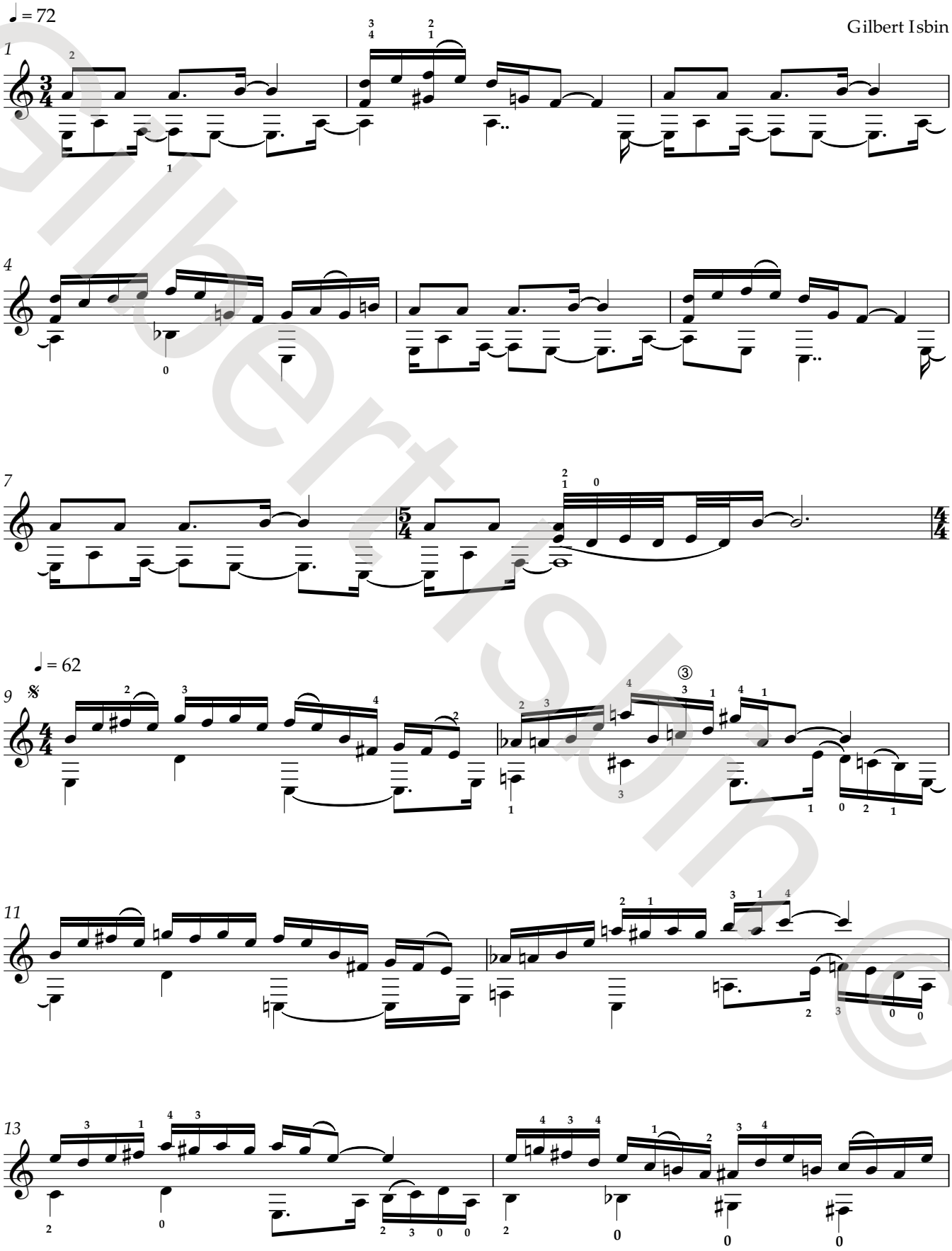

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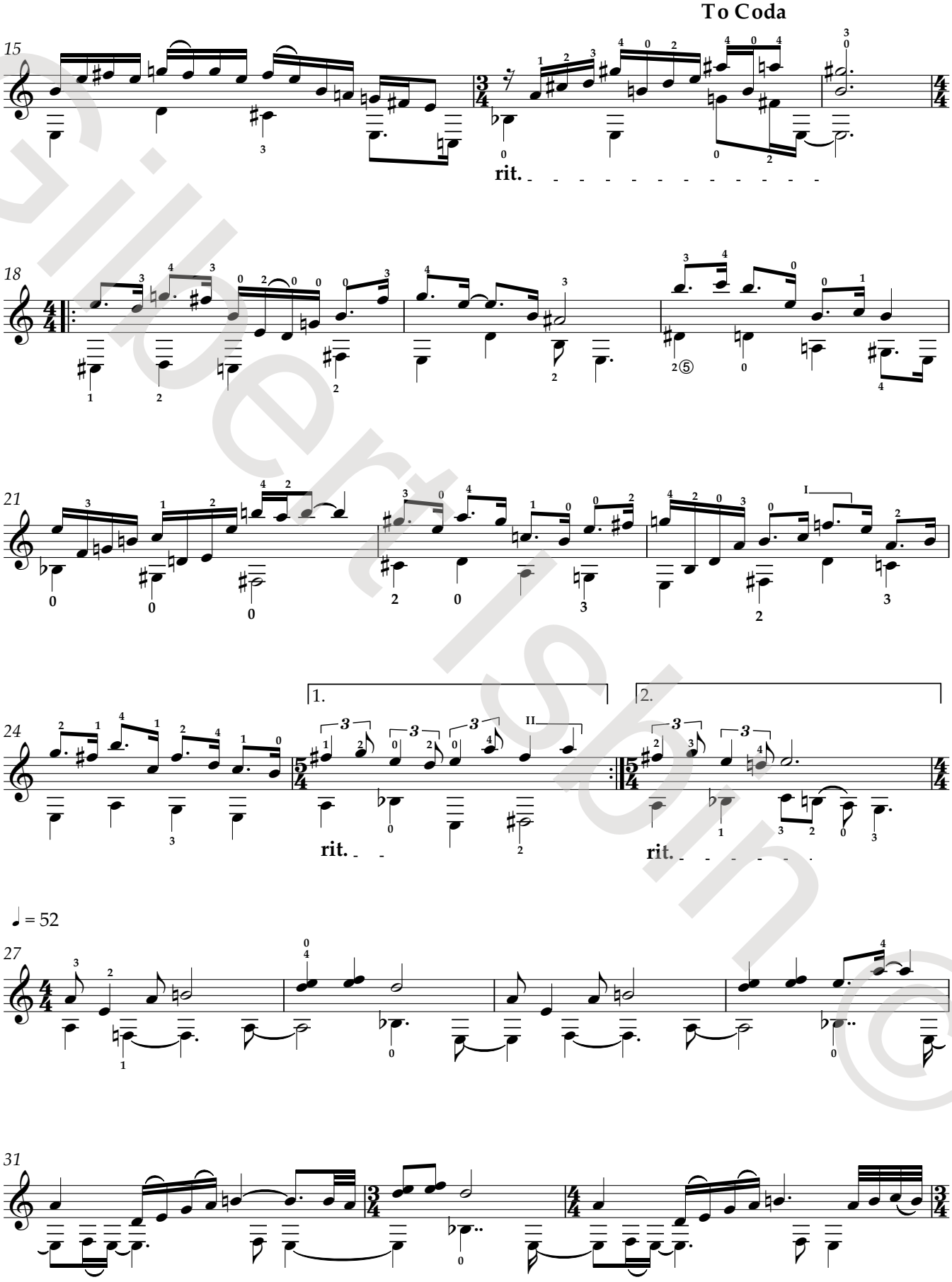

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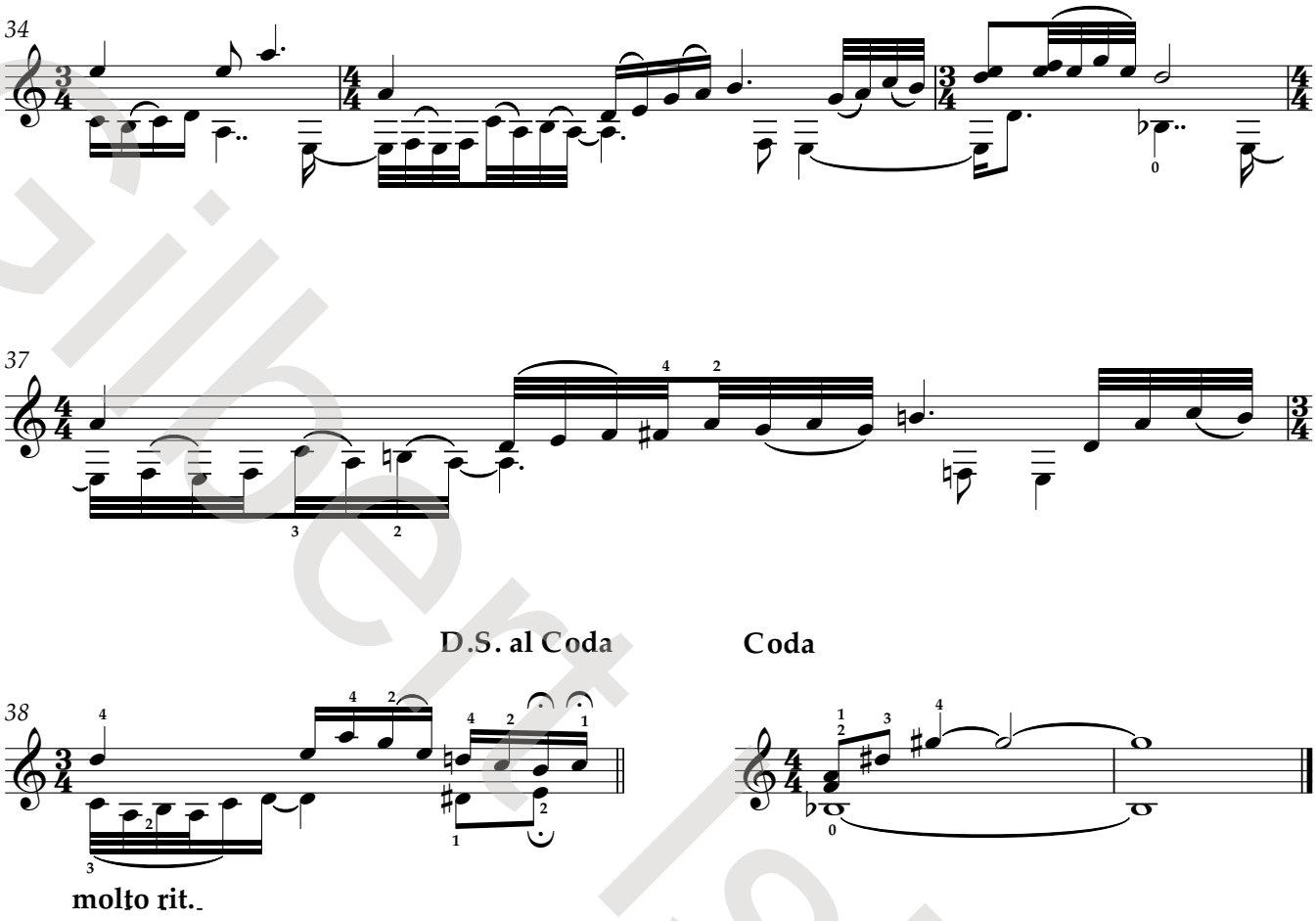

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TAING

For Rob MacKillop

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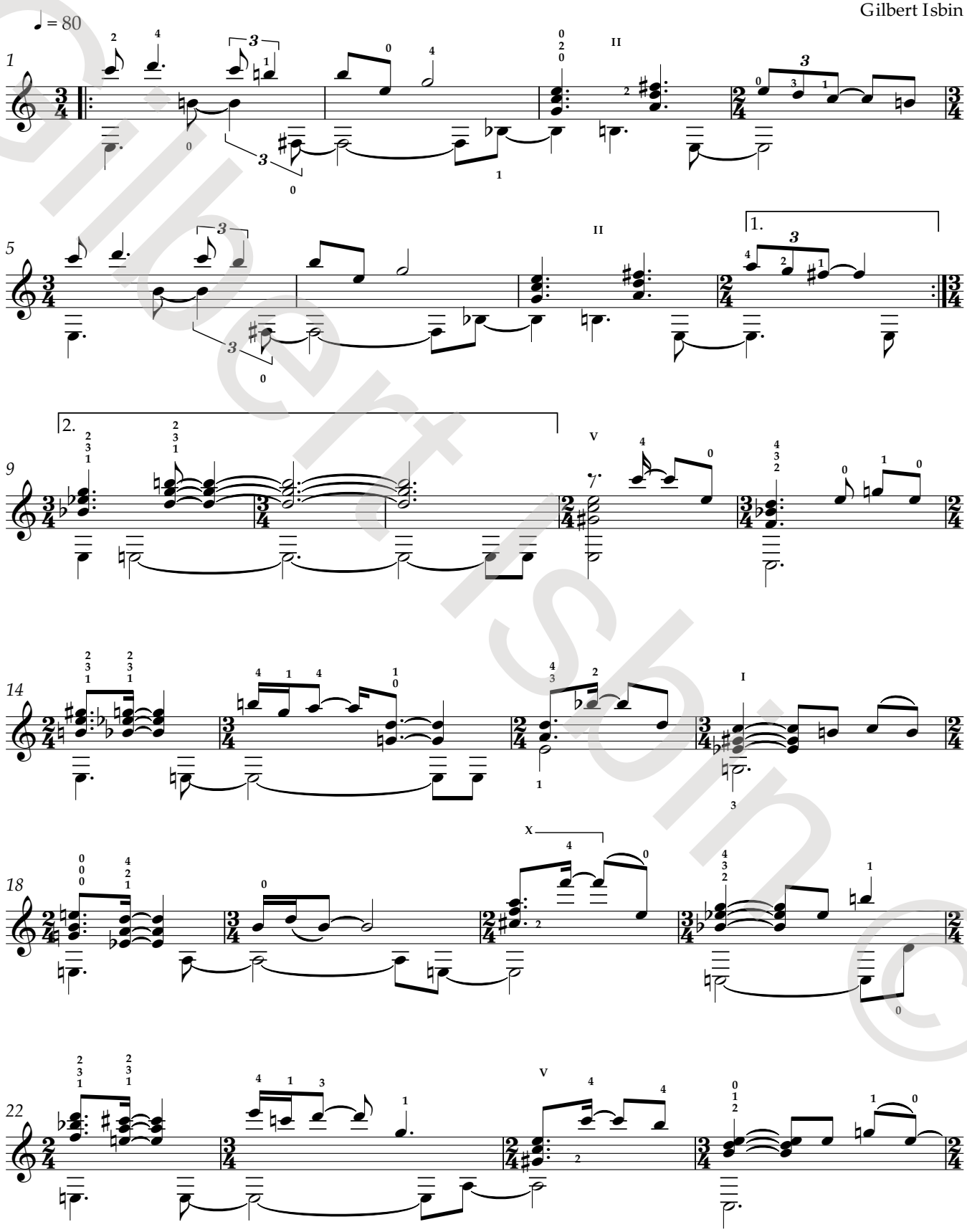

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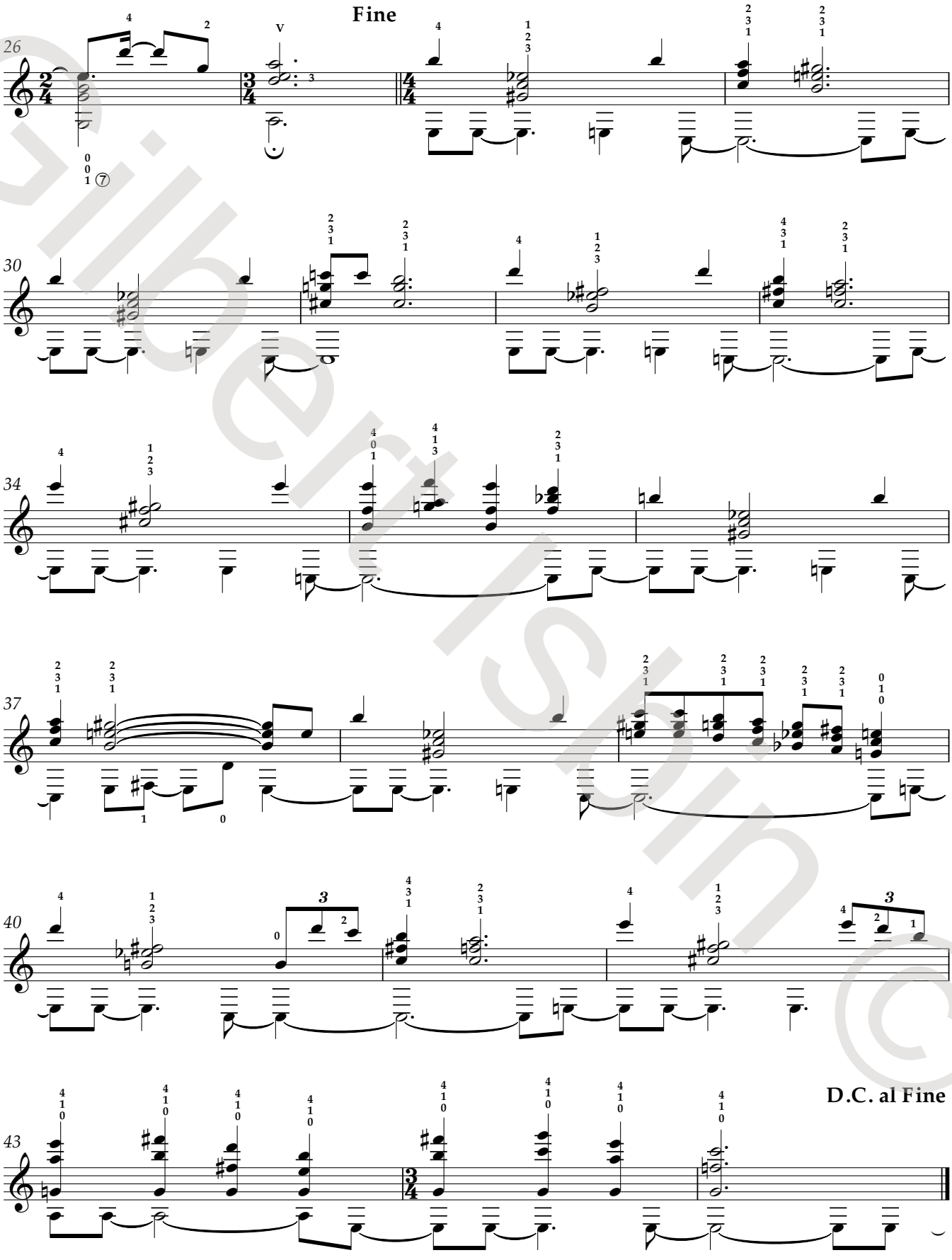

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