

'A' OK

British singer/songwriter Ed Sheeran's global hit 'The A Team' charts in the U.S. at last

"'The A Team' came from an experience I had when I did a gig at a homeless shelter," 21-year-old British singer/songwriter Ed Sheeran says of his breakout single, released by Elektra/Atlantic in the United States (and by Asylum in the United Kingdom). "I was 18 at the time and kind of quite naive. So, I was a bit taken aback by some of the stories that I heard.

"I got home that night and wrote a lot of the lyrics," he continues. "I wanted to write it so it sounded kind of upbeat, so you wouldn't really know what it's about, because it's quite a dark subject."

More specifically, Sheeran says the subject is hard drug use (and not a reference to the '80s TV show of the same name). "A drug like crack cocaine is called a 'class A' drug. That's in the same category as heroin. Instead of making it clear and just saying what [a person's] problem [with addiction] was, I'd say, 'She's in the 'class A' team.' It was

kind of my way of covering it up, making it a bit more subtle."

In the tradition of folk/rock hits like Suzanne Vega's "Luka" (about child abuse) or Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car" (alcoholism) that shade heavy topics under a melodic canopy, "The A Team" has gotten fans singing along to its sunny sound. Last summer, the track soared to No. 3 on the Official Charts Co.'s U.K. singles chart. It has since reached the top 10 in Australia, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand and Norway.

This week, Sheeran's worldwide hit makes its first appearance on a U.S. Billboard chart, debuting at No. 30 on the Triple A radio airplay tally. Chart reporter KTCZ (Cities 97) Minneapolis leads all panelists with 143 plays through April 18, according to Nielsen BDS. Among all monitored stations, adult top 40 KLLC (Alice @97.3) San Francisco leads with 345 plays, having been the first to

spin it stateside on Jan. 27.

Honored at this year's BRIT Awards as British breakthrough act and British solo male artist, Sheeran returns to his No. 17 peak on the Folk Albums chart with EP *The A-Team*. As he continues his first North American tour with Snow Patrol, the five-song collection sets up the June 12 U.S. arrival of his debut full-length, *+*. The Asylum/Warner set was No. 1 on the U.K. chart for three weeks last year.

Before then, Sheeran will throw fans a curve: the *Slumdon Bridge* EP (due April 24 on Elektra) with Shady/Interscope rapper Yelawolf, whom he's long admired. "I reached out, he said yes," Sheeran says. "We had 10 hours in a studio together and made four songs, which I love. The EP is a good fusion of both worlds." ●●●

For exclusive video content with Ed Sheeran, go to Billboard.com/chartbeat.

A new EP from ED SHEERAN features collaborations with rapper Yelawolf.

