

FRED & MARY

Period/Historical Rom-Com | 4 x 60

When a wealthy young German industrialist – and secret communist – falls in love with a whip-smart working-class Irish woman, their relationship will, quite literally, change the world forever...

Germany, 1842: Meet **Friedrich Engels**, 21. Tall, handsome, clever, charming...and loaded. Having just completed his military service in Berlin, he's set to inherit the family business: a prosperous, multinational textile manufacturer, Ermen & Engels, with factories in Germany and the UK...

...Oh, and he's also a communist.

When his deeply religious, conservative father (**Friedrich Engels Sr**) discovers his pride and joy has secretly been writing for radical newspapers, he hits the roof. But he's got just the idea to set his wayward son on the straight and narrow: packing him off to Manchester to take up a role in their cotton-spinning factory, under the tutelage of its despotic, money-hungry owner, **Peter Ermen**. That ought to teach the young troublemaker to be a good capitalist (and keep the Prussian secret police off his scent in the bargain).

Young Friedrich, understandably, isn't overjoyed at the prospect. But the role has its consolations. Nicknamed 'Cottonopolis', Manchester is the birthplace of the industrial revolution – and also, according to the latest communist theory, where European radicals expect the *real* revolution to begin. He resolves to play the dutiful son/apprentice...while gathering intelligence about the factory workers, and their readiness to take up arms against their oppressors. And who knows – he might just bag himself a front row seat (and a starring role?) in the coming class war...

On his way to Manchester, Friedrich visits the offices of a Cologne-based newspaper, the *Rheinischer Zeitung*, where he meets the newly installed 24-year-old editor...**Karl Marx**. The two don't hit it off immediately – an ego the size of Marx's won't easily tolerate rivals to the communist throne – but Friedrich does at least leave with a commission to write some reports about the condition of the English proletariat. Perhaps he can turn them into a book?

Arriving in Manchester, he discovers a city beyond his wildest nightmares. Where the sky is always black, and the machines never stand idle. Where the rivers run foul with industrial waste; where sewage and bodies pile up in the streets; where children as young as seven are sent to work – and die – in the mills. He's shown the ropes by Ermen and his sadistic younger brother, **Godfrey Ermen**...who soon rechristen him with the more English name 'Fred'.

But his apprenticeship truly begins when he meets a streetwise, sarky young Irish woman, **Mary Burns**, 19, selling oranges on a street corner. ‘Pretty, witty, and charming,’ Mary hasn’t had the most promising of starts in life. With her father in the workhouse and her mother dead, she’s been left to take care of her younger sister, **Lizzy**, and make her way in the world armed only with her wits. And she’s got history with the Ermen & Engels: having spent several years working there from the age of 9...and been sacked for spreading ‘dangerous ideas’ amongst her fellow workers...

Naturally, she’s a little suspicious of the conspicuously bourgeois ‘Fred’ and his claim, despite appearances, to be a radical. She’s sceptical, too, of his prediction that the revolution is right around the corner – she’s not so naive to think that liberation will come that easily. But, thanks to his charming manner and good looks, he slowly wins her round. They strike a deal: she’ll act as his tour guide to the grimy underworld of Manchester, in return for securing her a cushy job as a domestic servant to a rich family – and teaching her how to read.

Together, they’ll embark on a Mancunian odyssey: through its various slums, factory floors, cotton exchanges, debtor’s prisons, secret meetings, picket lines, and underground terrorist cells. A journey that will furnish Fred with the raw material to create his first great masterwork – *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) – and show him the true nature of Victorian capitalism, red in tooth and claw.

Somewhere along the way, this unlikeliest of couples will fall in love...and try, in spite of the class gulf between them, and the many obstacles thrown in their way (Fred’s disapproving parents, Karl’s jealousy), to make it work.

In later episodes, they’ll leave Manchester behind for London to witness the founding of the Communist League. On to Brussels, where Fred and Karl (with a little help from Mary) will collaborate on a pamphlet – *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). And when revolution suddenly breaks out all over Europe, onward to Cologne, Barmen and Paris, to fight on the front lines. But when the tides of reaction strangle the uprising in its cradle, they’ll be drawn inexorably back to their old lives in Manchester, where they’ll try their best to settle down to a respectable, ‘bourgeois’ existence...while Fred siphons off petty cash from his factory job to support his friend Karl’s quixotic, 20 year struggle to complete his magnum opus: *Das Kapital* (1867).

Fred & Mary is a love story, and a true one. A fast-talking, sharp-witted, darkly funny Dickensian rom-com, set among the chimneys and charnel houses of Manchester – *North & South* meets *When Harry Met Sally*. We’ll discover that, in many respects, the at-first alien world of mid-19th-century England bears more than a passing resemblance to our own...and consider whether the long-promised revolution in England will ever come to pass...